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The Washington Post · Le Monde

French throw euro plans into disarray

John Palmer in Luxembourg and Michael White

THE scheduled 1999 launch of the European single currency was thrown into chaos this week by the new French Socialist government. It refused to endorse the stability pact, a key measure designed to limit national budget deficits, unless it was matched by a European-wide drive to boost jobs and growth.

Its announcement on Monday was the latest in a series of setbacks for the euro, following the electoral humiliation of the French right, and the Bundesbank's rejection of the German government's plan to revalue gold reserves to help it achieve the Maastricht qualification criteria.

Germany made it clear it was furious with the French, until now its close ally in the drive towards the single currency. "What has been agreed upon and discussed for two years can no longer be put up for negotiation," said the German finance minister, Theo Waigel.

While France insisted it was ready to sign up to the tough single currency stability pact terms, its related demands for balancing economic action on employment now make it unclear whether the European Union summit in Amsterdam, which begins on June 16, can ratify the monetary union (EMU) pact. If it cannot, the Dutch presidency is ready to call a follow-up summit a few weeks later.

Attending his first meeting of EU finance ministers in Luxembourg, the French economy minister, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, said: "We have no problem with the stability pact as such. But agreement to put employment back at the heart of policy-making would ensure greater credibility for monetary union not only with the financial world but with the peoples of Europe."

Mr Strauss-Kahn said that before agreeing to the pact the French government had first to present its detailed economic strategy to the National Assembly in Paris on June 19. This would seem to rule out the possibility of the Amsterdam summit giving its legal blessing to the single currency rules.

The British Chancellor, Gordon Brown, agreed with Mr Strauss-Kahn. He said: "There is an understanding that if the single currency is to succeed there must be attention to jobs and growth as well as budgetary discipline . . . There is a new sense that we must give priority to jobs and growth. That is the majority concern right across Europe."

Although the stability pact is not part of the negotiations for a new post-Maastricht treaty, EU leaders had counted on approving both measures in Amsterdam. Partly under pressure from the French and partly because of the risk of launching the euro without sufficient co-ordination of national economic policies, the drive is on to create a strong economic pillar for EMU. "Until now everyone has focused on the creation of a powerful central bank. But this will only work if the bank has a strong economic partner in terms of EU governments acting together on macro-economic policy," a senior European Commission official said.

Britain's prime minister Tony Blair told Europe's other centre-left governments last week that they have an historic chance to seize the political initiative by rejecting old-style statism in favour of the new global agenda. But in a blunt warning to his fellow European leaders meeting in Malmö, Sweden, he said: "We must modernise or die."

Mr Blair has pleased his EU colleagues by agreeing to sign the social chapter on working arrangements. But he said he would be keeping a "watchful eye" to make sure it does not jeopardise job creation — the issue he believes should be at the top of the European agenda.

Left-of-centre parties are now in a majority in the EU council of ministers and at the Strasbourg parliament. Mr Blair sees it as a great opportunity. But they will all be punished "if we go back to the old ways".

Later, he travelled to Bonn for his first official meeting with Chancellor Helmut Kohl, where he won the German leader's support for his drive to make jobs the priority of a modernised "people's Europe".

"People are looking to Britain to give some leadership, and people like the idea of a Britain constructively engaged and setting the agenda," Mr Blair said after talks in the Bonn chancellery.



An estimated 500,000 people with respiratory ailments converged on a small house in the southern Indian town of Hyderabad last weekend for a miracle cure of herbs and water stuffed inside a live fish. The Gaud family, which has been giving the medicine away for 152 years, is said to have received the cure from a saint. It is administered once a year on an astrologically auspicious day PHOTOGRAPH: DESIKAN KRISHNAN

Labour threatens to jail corrupt MPs and judges

Ewen MacAskill

THE British Home Secretary, Jack Straw, this week spelt out his proposals to jail corrupt MPs for up to seven years as part of the Government's determination to drive sleaze out of public life.

Under his plans, a single offence of corruption will apply to MPs as well as judges, councillors and other public servants. At present, MPs are exempt from criminal law on bribery, with Parliament only having the power to expel corrupt members.

The proposed legislation would not be retrospective and could not apply to Neil Hamilton, the former Tory MP for Tatton, who is being investigated by Sir Gordon Downey, the parliamentary standards ombudsman, over cash for questions.

The Hamilton affair prompted Labour to draw up the bill, which is being delayed until next year's Queen's Speech because of the heavy load this year and also to allow the Nolan committee, which was set up to investigate standards in public life, to complete its report.

The Nolan committee is also to look at party funding. Labour has said it wants all donations above £5,000 ($8,000) to be identified. Labour does this at present. The measure would be aimed at the Conservative party, the most secretive of the British parties about funding.

The Government hopes that the legislation will act as a deterrent to any MPs tempted to transgress. During the election, Tony Blair promised to clean up politics after the first two weeks of the campaign was dominated by sleaze.

The bill will close a loophole in the law dating back to the 1689 Bill of Rights, which gives MPs immunity from public prosecution.

Labour has embarrassment of its own, with the party due to complete an interim report this week on Mohammed Sarwar, Labour MP for Glasgow Govan, who denies a newspaper allegation that he gave a political opponent £5,000 as a bribe.

The review was widely seen at Westminster as a vindication for the Guardian, which has been campaigning for change. Ministers acknowledged it had its origin in the libel action taken by Mr Hamilton against the paper.

Ann Taylor, the Leader of the House, said a review by a committee from the Commons and Lords was needed because there were "so many grey areas". It was a direct response, she said, to the previous government's decision to amend the Defamation Act solely to allow Mr Hamilton to bring a libel action against the Guardian.

Mrs Taylor said: "The basic protection of freedom of speech in Parliament is very important. However, the way parliamentary privilege works can prevent the courts from looking at issues where there is a public interest."

● The Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, Sir Gordon Downey, has warned that Britain might be ready for a Parliament made up of professional politicians with no outside interests. He told the Bar magazine, Counsel, that he had changed his mind over MPs' interests, adding to the pressure for MPs to shed all paid consultancies.

General drops out over affair

Alex Duval Smith in Washington

CRUCIAL United States military decisions, including the future of Bosnian peacekeeping and Nato enlargement policies, were in the balance this week after the air force general bidding for the top soldier's job in the Pentagon withdrew his application after admitting adultery.

General Joseph Ralston, who had been widely tipped to become the next chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, withdrew from the race after he admitted having an affair 13 years ago while separated from his wife.

Gen Ralston, aged 53, is the latest and highest-ranking victim of moves to create gender-neutral US services. He was called in to see the defence secretary, William Cohen, on Monday and announced his decision afterwards.

The withdrawal of Gen Ralston, currently vice-chairman of the joint chiefs of staff and a decorated Vietnam war veteran, leaves open the process of replacing General John Shalikashvili, who is retiring on September 30.

The new incumbent as joint chief of staff will have crucial input in a number of important decisions, including the role of the military in the imminent enlargement of Nato and whether US forces withdraw from Bosnia as scheduled next year.

Martin Walker, page 6

Right wins tight race in Ireland 3

Japan in dock over wildlife 4

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Austria	A$30	Malta	50c
Belgium	BF75	Netherlands	G 4.75
Denmark	DK16	Norway	NK 16
Finland	FM 10	Portugal	E300
France	FF 13	Saudi Arabia	SR 6.50
Germany	DM 4	Spain	P 300
Greece	DR 450	Sweden	SK 18
Italy	L 3,000	Switzerland	SF3.50

Africa wrong to blame West for debt problems

HAVING spent part of my career in Malawi I sympathise with the sentiments of Trevor Smith and his frustration at the lack of resources for his hospital in Zambia (May 18). But he is wrong to blame this situation on debt to Western governments.

Zambians are among the most talented people in Africa and their country is fabulously endowed with natural and agricultural resources. But the former Zambian nation was dragged low by the ineffectiveness and vice of its own governments.

On the basis of their past record the West simply does not trust the government of Zambia or of other deeply indebted nations. In particular keeping the debt on the books ensures that Zambia continues to spend at least some money on basic needs such as health and education.

If the debt were cancelled it is all too likely that Zambia would go on a temporary spending spree, financed out of commercial borrowing, on military toys, prestige projects and perks for ministers and their associates. Then, when the time came to repay these loans, they would have to cut back limited government spending even further. The Zambian government's recent record, although a great improvement on its predecessors, tends to support this hypothesis.

Only when African countries stop their ritual blaming of the West and start to deal with their own problems by establishing accountable and reasonably honest government structures, can they hope to escape from the trap of poverty. It is not my impression that Zambia has yet travelled this far.

Alistair Milne,
University of Surrey, Guildford

I AGREE with Trevor Smith's comments on Zambia's debt problem. However, the issue of Third World debt aside, which is not to minimise its impact or what Dr Smith says, still leaves me wondering about the budgetary priorities of Third World leaders. Who are the "prophets" who dare to speak out against the often flagrant embezzlement of funds that should be put into hospitals such as Dr Smith's and other projects that benefit the whole population and not just the élites ensconced in luxury far from the "wretched of the earth"?

This issue must be addressed, otherwise we will see more of what has happened in the former Zaire spreading to other countries in Africa in particular. Will Laurent Kabila and future rebels learn the lessons from their own revolution or will we simply see the turning of the same old wheel? I sincerely hope it is the former.

Martin Klopper,
Taichung, Taiwan

WE HAVE all heard of the Third World debt crisis, of hopelessly poor nations unable to pay their debts, and of the human suffering that goes with it. The lenders often assert a principle of international law: that state obligations belong to a land and its people, not a regime.

It is frightening to think that, should my partner and I decide to give our newborn child the Zairean nationality that we are entitled to, then hanging over the child's head would be a debt of about $160,000 owed to the IMF and its affiliates.

Worst of all is that, despite knowing where the money was going — ie, Swiss bank accounts — the world kept pouring money into Zaire. I strongly believe that if a despotic power incurs a debt not for the needs of or in the interest of the state, but to strengthen its despotic regime, to repress the population that fights against it, this debt is not an obligation on the nation. It is a personal debt of the power that has incurred it. Consequently, it falls with the fall of this power.

Theodore Mfuni-Bukasa,
London

Washington's selective memory

HISTORICAL amnesia is alive and well and apparently promoting hypocrisy in the United States. Or so we can conclude from the remarks of the US under-secretary of commerce, Stuart Eizenstat, on Swiss neutrality during the second world war (Nazi gold report criticises Switzerland, May 18).

"In the unique circumstances of World War II, neutrality collided with morality; too often, being neutral provided a pretext for avoiding moral considerations," lectures Mr Eizenstat. Well, who better than the Americans to know? The US remained officially neutral during the war until the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, more than two years after the war began following the German army's invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939. Even after the attack on Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt declared war on Japan alone, believing little public support existed for a European war. Fortunately, Hitler relieved him of the problem by declaring war on the US scant days after the Japanese attack.

In the 27 months preceding its entry into the war, the US maintained its neutrality while Germany conquered and occupied Poland, Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium, France, Yugoslavia and Greece, bombed Britain, swept across North Africa, and invaded the Soviet Union.

The Swiss may have failed in their moral duty to oppose the Nazis, but for more than two years the US kept them good company.

David Dear,
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Apologies due to Aborigines

YOU report that the Australian prime minister, John Howard, "apologised" about the "stolen children" to the Australian Reconciliation Convention (June 1). True, he did make a statement of personal regret — then went on to harangue the largely Aboriginal audience, undoing the modest good that his inadequate apology might have done. That's why some in the audience turned their backs on him.

As one prominent visitor observed, he showed balls and no heart. Now he says he can't apologise if he is not prepared to pay financial compensation. In the previous week you reported the unreserved apology made on behalf of the United States government by President Clinton to the Tuskagee victims (May 25). Mr Howard would have done well to have read Mr Clinton's statement, and learned from both it and the manner in which it was offered.

Reconciliation requires us to listen to the pain of others, and show that we are prepared to open ourselves to it. Acknowledging the past is the first step.

Ray Brindle,
Kyneton, Victoria, Australia

THE Australian prime minister did not "apologise" to Aboriginal people for the long-standing policy of forced removal of children from their families.

In fact, John Howard has for some time explicitly excluded the possibility of an apology on behalf of the nation, to the distress of those who wish to see decency and humanity prevail in the current debate on racial equality. Instead, he has offered a personal expression of regret so hedged by qualifications as to be of virtually no value in the increasingly ugly environment of confrontation and resentment that his government is fostering.

Since taking power in March last year, the Liberal-National coalition has been pursuing a rigorous disavowal of the history of indigenous deprivation in Australia. It has gutted the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission without reallocating its funding to any other Aboriginal group, and has failed to speak out against the newly emerged One Nation Party whose racist policies are gaining a foothold in some parts of the country. Additionally, the government is in the process of legislating to remove the minor concessions to traditional Aboriginal land-ownership recently recognised by the High Court.

Nick Kiemer,
Mossman, NSW, Australia

Tough on the causes of crime

THE figures indicating that England and Wales have become the crime capital of Europe (England and Wales top crime league, June 1) will doubtless be used by Jack Straw to vindicate his policies, aimed primarily at lax families and recalcitrant children. But the fact is that crime has grown least in those European countries where discrepancies of wealth and opportunity are lowest, or where governments have worked to ameliorate the effects of globalisation and de-industrialisation upon the most vulnerable.

In 1981, in both Britain and France, approximately 3.5 million offences were recorded by the police. By the end of the decade, the number in Britain was approaching 6 million. In France, between 1983 and 1986, there was a decline to around 3 million, from which the figure rose gradually to around 3.8 million by 1990. In Britain, crime rose fastest in the poorest neighbourhoods; in France it was in the poorest neighbourhoods that the fall was most marked.

It is difficult to resist the conclusion that much of this difference was due to the policies pursued by the Mitterrand administration, which channelled educational, training, housing and community resources into high-crime suburbs, subsidised industry to bring jobs, decentralised key ministries and created new forms of democratic participation for the "socially excluded" and the young.

Mr Straw might remember that the Tory legacy in the field of crime and disorder is a product of their denial of a "social" dimension to crime.

(Prof) John Pitts,
University of Luton, Bedfordshire

Briefly

I HOPE the report from Mazar-i-Sharif was not in any way an apologia for the status of women in Afghanistan (June 1). The loss of freedom for a few is a reasonable price to pay for peace? Perhaps, but though Afghan women are not usually visible to the naked eye, and I do not have any statistics to hand, I do not think that half the population of a country could be counted as "a few".

Christopher Barnett,
Tokyo, Japan

IN LIGHT of the world-wide problem with the clearance of landmines, has the flail device of the second world war been forgotten or overlooked? The system comprised a tank with a projecting framework some distance forward supporting a horizontal axle to which were attached rapidly rotating chain flails. As the tank advanced across a minefield, the spinning flails beat the ground setting off the mines far enough ahead of the armoured vehicle to minimise damage.

Harry White,
Portland, Oregon, USA

IN A period in which the most powerful governments have trumpeted a commitment to human rights, the worst failures have been the refusal of the international community to stop genocide in Rwanda or ethnic cleansing in Bosnia. The ability of Labour to improve on Britain's contribution to addressing the most serious human rights crises of all will depend on the realisation of other pledges. The United Nations, in the words of Labour's manifesto, is only as strong as its member states allow it to be.

Ian Martin,
University of Essex, Colchester

I AGREE with Tom Smith's letter (May 25) on education abroad. Czech being a notoriously difficult language, we have sent our children to the French school in Prague, where they too are doing fine.

Meanwhile Czech nursery schools are teaching foreign languages to children even before they can read. In the secondary system there are élite, highly competitive schools that do most of their teaching in English, French, German, Italian or Spanish. All these schools are within the state system. Could this ever happen in Britain?

Each language learned opens a window on to the world.

Lucy Trench,
Prague, Czech Republic

WERE the lesbian couple who artificially inseminated themselves using a syringe and a pickle jar (May 25) trying for a baby cucumber?

Chris Rhodes,
Asmara, Eritrea

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Ahern toasts unstable Irish victory

David Sharrock

THE Fianna Fail leader Bertie Ahern celebrated victory last weekend in the Irish general election but, deprived of an overall majority, he will have to haggle over government places for support from smaller parties and independents.

On Monday he brushed aside speculation of early, fresh polls and said he was determined his minority government would last its term. "The aim will be to have a four-or five-year government," he told Irish radio as he prepared to carry out campaign priorities to cut taxes and crime and boost the peace process in Northern Ireland.

Party totals

Fianna Fail	77
Fine Gael	54
Labour	17
Progressive Democrats	4
Greens	2
Democratic Left	4
Sinn Fein	1
Others	7

Mr Ahern, whose centre-right alliance with the Progressive Democrats won 81 of parliament's 166 seats, said he hoped independent parties, on whose support he will have to rely, would be mindful of the need for political stability.

He said he would make peace in Northern Ireland his top priority and that he would meet the Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams before being formally sworn in as prime minister when parliament reconvenes on June 26.

The poor performance of his running partner, Mary Harney, leader of the conservative Progressive Democrats, means that their election campaign coalition fell short of an outright majority and will therefore have to rely on an enlarged pool of independent MPs, some of whom were elected on single-issue tickets as specialised as receiving British television on Ireland's west coast.

Mr Ahern may also try to clinch a deal with the environmentalist Green party's two members, but he has already ruled out bringing on board Sinn Fein until there is an IRA ceasefire.

Sinn Fein will see its first member entering Leinster House since the Irish Free State was established in 1921. An upsurge in its vote — less than 3 per cent nationally, but enough in carefully targeted constituencies to alarm the established parties of the republic — has boosted hopes that the IRA will soon restore its ceasefire.

Mr Ahern, speaking of his hopes that the peace process can be moved forward, said: "You keep coming back to the position it's very hard to get anywhere as long as there's violence. I have said this to Gerry Adams, I have said it to others.

"They have stated in the Westminster elections, in the elections here, there is a peace strategy designed to make peace in the country. I think they have to prove that now . . . if they prove their part I will do everything I humanly can to move the process forward. But I cannot do an awful lot of things I would like to do unless there's peace."



Ahern: short of a majority

The biggest casualty of the election was Labour, whose support nosedived by 9 per cent, leaving it with just 17 seats. But the party leader, Dick Spring, ruled out going into coalition with Mr Ahern.

The outgoing prime minister leader John Bruton found comfort in a nearly 4 per cent rise in his party's votes and noted Fianna Fail remained static but gained seats through vote management.

Paramilitary ban, page 10
Comment, page 12

Chirac brokers a ceasefire in Brazzaville

Helen Vesperini in Brazzaville

HEAVY gunfire echoed across Brazzaville on Monday despite an announcement by France of a ceasefire agreement by warring parties in the Congolese capital, residents said.

The French president, Jacques Chirac, had obtained a verbal agreement for a ceasefire in telephone conversations with the Congolese president, Pascal Lissouba, and his rival, the former president, Denis Sassou-Nguesso, a spokeswoman from the president's office said.

She said Mr Chirac had asked the two adversaries "to decide on a ceasefire as soon as possible and accept the mediation of [the Gabon president] Omar Bongo to seek a political solution".

Fighting began on Thursday last week when government troops surrounded Mr Sassou-Nguesso's home to enforce a ban on private militias, after clashes in the north ahead of the July 27 presidential election.

On Monday night, a broadcast on the main state radio frequency declared that Mr Sassou-Nguesso's militia controlled most of the capital. The broadcast appeared to indicate that the state radio building had been captured, but there was no direct confirmation of this and the frequency might have been used by another transmitter.

French troops evacuated foreigners to their base and four French military Transall planes, each carrying about 90 people, flew out of the city after a morning of heavy fighting. Diplomats said about 300 more French and other foreign nationals were waiting to be evacuated.

The defence ministry in Paris said it was sending 800 troops, 300 more than initially planned. "We'll have 1,200 men on the ground," a spokesman said.

France decided to send more troops to its former colony after a French soldier was killed in a firefight and after receiving reports of hostility toward French nationals. — *Reuter*

Italian police officers flank Pietro Aglieri after his capture in Sicily last week. His is the latest in a string of arrests that have cast doubt of the future of the Mafia
PHOTOGRAPH: MIKE PALAZZOTTO

Women fill third of French cabinet

Paul Webster in Paris

FIVE WOMEN, including a Communist and a Green, were given senior ministries in Lionel Jospin's 15-member Socialist-led cabinet, which was announced last week.

Apart from the youth ministry for the Communist, Marie-George Buffet, the prime minister also chose another Communist, Jean-Claude Gayssot, as transport minister.

Mr Jospin fulfilled his promise during the campaign to give women a third of the top posts in accordance with Socialist party policy. Two other women, including a Communist, were given non-cabinet jobs.

The most senior post went to a Socialist, Martine Aubry, a former labour minister, who will be responsible for employment and social solidarity. The other women cabinet members were the Socialists Elisabeth Guigou (justice) and Catherine Trautmann (culture), and the leader of Les Verts, Dominique Voynet (environment).

Mr Jospin, who will remain Socialist party first secretary until a congress in autumn, went twice to the Elysée to discuss his cabinet with the president, Jacques Chirac.

The prime minister had to take into account five main leftwing parties, which form the parliamentary majority, in drawing up his list. The former Socialist defence minister, Jean-Pierre Chevènement, who now runs the Citizens' Movement, becomes interior minister, but the most sensitive jobs were kept for Socialists.

The foreign minister will be Hubert Védrine, and the finance minister, Dominique Strauss-Kahn. Mr Védrine was François Mitterrand's secretary-general at the Elysée during preparation of the Maastricht treaty. A diplomat, he was credited with ensuring the smooth relationship between Mitterrand and the Gaullist prime minister, Edouard Balladur, from 1993 to 1995.

But there were no jobs for the former culture minister, Jack Lang, and the former prime minister, Michel Rocard, who had both sought top posts. Another former prime minister, Laurent Fabius, will become National Assembly speaker.

Although there was an attempt to mark a break from the Mitterrand years, the key appointments owe much to the late president's encouragement of Ms Aubry and Ms Guigou, and coincide with the arrival of a record number of women in parliament.

A surprise announcement was the appointment of Bernard Kouchner, the former humanitarian aid minister, as junior health minister. A Radical-Socialist, he recently said he was disgusted with politics and intended to run a hospital in Africa.

● The new government has ordered the shutdown of the Super Phénix fastbreeder atomic power station, near Grenoble, ending 20 years of experiments with Germany and Italy to develop advanced energy supplies and treat plutonium waste.

Ms Voynet, the environment minister, was told by Mr Jospin, that she has *carte blanche* to arrange a shutdown which will include compensation for 2,500 researchers, technicians and subcontractors, and at least $3.2 billion in indemnities for France's partners.

Ms Voynet has also been told she can announce the end of the Rhine-Rhône canal widening, a central issue of an election campaign that helped greens to enter the National Assembly for the first time.

Le Monde, page 13

The Week

THREE parties rejected the results of the Algerian elections and threatened to lodge protests after the government claimed its National Assembly for Democracy (RND) had won 155 seats, the largest single holding but not an absolute majority.
Comment, page 12
Washington Post, page 15

INDONESIA has jettisoned a deal to buy nine F-16 fighter jets from the United States over repeated criticism of its human rights record in the US Congress.

A CIA agent, Harold Nicholson, was jailed for 23 years after he admitted selling national security secrets to Russia. He is the highest-ranking CIA officer to be convicted of spying.

ROSNY SMARTH resigned as prime minister of Haiti after months of criticism of his government's economic policies.

PRESIDENT Boris Yeltsin proposed a national referendum in the autumn on whether to bury Lenin's body or let it remain on public display in Moscow's Red Square.

ISRAELI and Palestinian negotiators held their first meeting in more than two months in Cairo. They plan to meet again to try to restart the stalled Middle East peace process.
Comment, page 12

MEMBERS of Sierra Leone's dissolved parliament met in defiance of a ban on political activity to denounce last month's military coup and call for the return of the ousted civilian president, Ahmad Tejan Kabbah.

THE US House of Representatives voted to reinstate a strict ban on aid to international groups that directly or indirectly fund abortions in developing countries.

CHILDREN of men and women who served in the Gulf war are no more likely to be born with defects than those in the population at large, according to an official survey whose findings could have a far-reaching impact on US policy towards its military veterans.

A FIRE at an 11th century Hindu temple in the south Indian town of Thanjavur claimed at least 40 lives.

PRESIDENT Clinton has endorsed a US ban on human cloning as recommended by a federal bioethics commission.
Washington Post, page 15

THE Czech manufacturers of Semtex have decided to make their explosive less appealing to terrorists by giving it a shelf life that would render it ineffective after two years.

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
June 15 1997

Japanese 'bribes' threaten wildlife

Paul Brown

JAPAN has been accused of "buying" the votes of small Caribbean states with overseas aid in order to block efforts to save endangered species such as elephants, turtles and whales.

A report on Japanese "bribes" was released to delegates at the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (Cites), which opened in the Zimbabwean capital, Harare, on Monday.

The countries alleged to have sold their votes in return for supporting Japan at the convention are Grenada, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, Dominica, and St Vincent and the Grenadines.

The "vote consolidation operation", as Tokyo's fisheries' ministry documents describe Caribbean aid, is designed to defend Japan's interests against the environment lobby. Among the examples of aid quoted are grants totalling $29 million to St Lucia between 1987 and 1995, and a similar amount to St Vincent over the same period.

Lesley Sutty, a biologist from the Eastern Caribbean Coalition for Environmental Awareness (Eccea), which researched and compiled the report, said: "These countries are vulnerable because the banana industry is in the doldrums and they are in financial trouble. Japan has come in and poured money into fishery programmes, docks and boats.

"It has bought its way into their 200-mile exclusive economic zone to get access to [illegible] their votes at international conventions. It is effectively bribing them with aid. It is a moral issue, and Japan's activities are immoral."

The report concludes: "Japan is seeking to manipulate international organisations that are designed to make decisions beneficial to all humanity in order to benefit its own vested economic interest."

Japan's "vote consolidation programme" was first suspected in 1992. A bloc vote at the International Whaling Commission, shored up by five Caribbean islands siding with Japan and Norway, has often been sufficient to hold off adverse votes on whaling.

The report says the success of the programme has encouraged Tokyo to extend its influence to Cites and the Convention on Biodiversity. In Harare, Japan wants the ivory trade to start again and Cuba to be allowed to export the Hawksbill turtle, which is protected. Japan is listed as a buyer for both products.

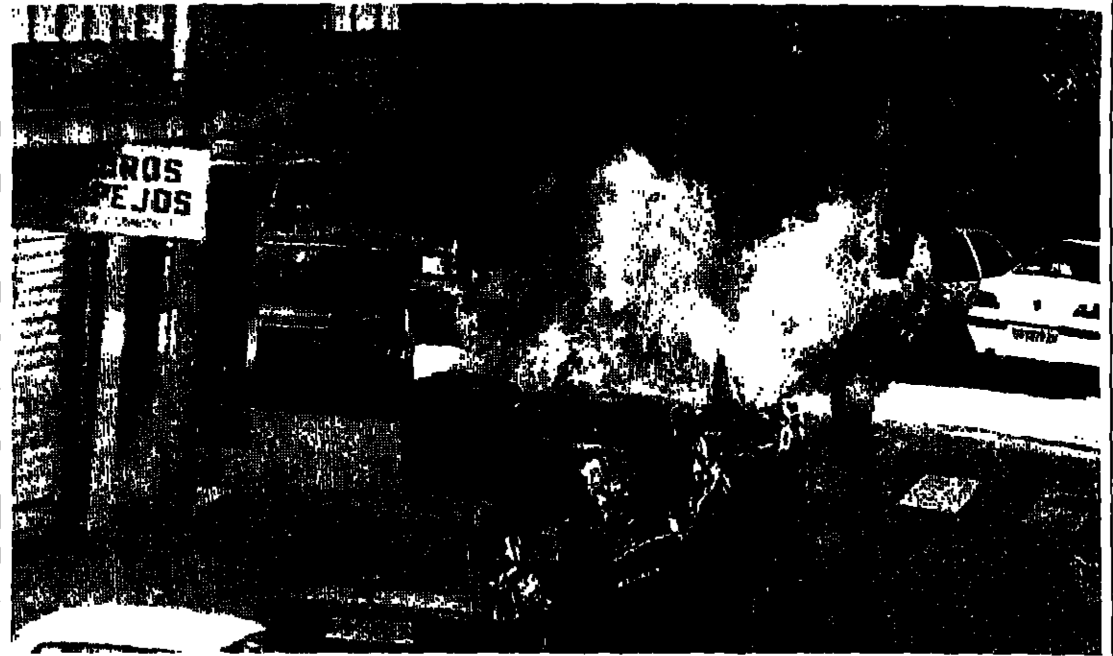
But Japan's main efforts are directed towards fish and sea mammals. It consumes 30 per cent of the world's fish, and the Tokyo fish market turns over $32 million a day. The Japanese fishing industry finances the Caribbean states, providing port facilities for its own deep sea vessels, and trawlers and training for local people.

Japan also acts with other whaling countries at the Cites talks. Norway is putting forward proposals for trade to be permitted in minke whales from the northeast and central Atlantic, and Japan wants to legitimise coastal whaling around Japan, plus its continued hunting of minke whales around Antarctica. The proposal is to "downlist" whales from absolute protection to permitting limited trade.

The report says the bloc vote has been used to avoid international law outlawing exploitation of dolphins and fish such as the blue-finned tuna. Dominica, St Lucia and St Vincent all voted with Japan during negotiations in Jakarta in 1995.

Vassili Papastavrou, from the International Fund for Animal Welfare, said: "Documents from the fishing ministry, statements made in the Caribbean, and open discussion in Japanese newspapers of the policy makes it clear what the plan is. Of course these countries have a legitimate right to go to these conventions and make their view heard, but we are seriously concerned that they are being used by Japan to further its own aims.

"It is a simple economic fact that these island nations cannot afford to send delegations half way round the world to vote unless they have substantial financial help. We hope Japan is duly embarrassed."



Flames engulf the car of a prison officer in Granada, Spain, last week after a bomb squad detonated an explosive device it said had been hidden inside by Basque separatists PHOTOGRAPH: JUAN FERREROS

Holes spotted in Black Sea fleet deal

David Hearst in Moscow

IT SEEMED like a historic compromise. Russia keeps the Crimean port of Sevastopol as the base for its Black Sea fleet and, in return, Ukraine gets $2.5 billion in rent over the next two decades, almost enough to pay off its energy debts to Moscow. Handshakes and smiles all round, as the oldest and most rancorous dispute between the two largest states of the Soviet empire was settled.

But last week rumblings of discontent continued. Crimea's pro-Russian parliament adopted a statement condemning the joint military exercises that 100 United States marines are planning to undertake at a Ukrainian port in August, just 100km up the coast from the Russian base.

"Sea Breeze '97" is ostensibly a rehearsal of an amphibious landing by troops to protect aid supplies to an imaginary country devastated by an earthquake, but for the Russian community of former Soviet sailors in Crimea, the seismic tremors are real enough.

"The fact that the Crimean peninsula has been virtually turned into a training ground for testing Nato plans presents a particular danger," the parliamentary declaration read.

The former commander of the Black Sea fleet, Admiral Eduard Baltin, dismissed last year for his outspoken stance on the division of the Soviet fleet between Russia and Ukraine, has a terrible sinking feeling about his former command.

He describes the deal as absurd. The Russian fleet can be blockaded by Ukrainian vessels, which now control two strategic inlets at the entrance to the port.

The $100 million Russia will pay annually for rent, he believes, would be better spent constructing a new Russian port to the west of the peninsula on Lake Solyonoye, near Anapa.

Admiral Baltin said: "The radically weakened Black Sea fleet is incapable of fulfilling even the most [illegible] peace-time functions, such as providing maritime security for our merchant fleet. The fleet has already lost its aviation group and what you see in Sevastopol is not the same fleet that it was."

Russia currently has 110 warships and 350 other vessels, but 100 of them are considered fit only for the scrapyard. The fleet's youngest ship is 15 years old. Ukraine has 30 warships and under the deal will receive a further 52 vessels.

Admiral Baltin was exhausted by his three-year period of command. It was not strategy and naval exercises that occupied him, but potatoes and uniforms: "We were under a permanent economic blockade. Each lorry we brought in had to pay $10 . . . for 'ecological damage'. We had to pay fantastic prices just to bring potatoes in by train, and the fleet needs 13,000 tons of potatoes a year.

"I remember the time when a train-load of sailors' uniforms stood immobilised at the frontier while the Ukrainians were checking the documents. Everything was in order but then we were asked to produce a document from the Ukrainian sanitation service, certifying that the uniforms would be safe to wear."

The Soviet ensign was due to come down on the Russian ships for the last time this week. On that day Russia will burrow deep into its history for emblematic inspiration, to heroes like Catherine the Great, founder of the Black Sea fleet.

Admiral Baltin said: "A loose woman and non-Russian, Empress Catherine the Great was a greater Russian patriot than today's rulers of Russia. Yeltsin is not a collector of Russian lands, as several Russian tsars were. He simply sells them off."

Secret vote on ivory urged

Andrew Meldrum in Harare

THREE African governments lobbying for controlled trade in elephant ivory have called for a secret vote on the issue at a crucial conservation conference which opened in the Zimbabwean capital on Monday.

Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe — who argue they have too many elephants, and poor rural communities that need ivory revenue — say sympathetic countries would have difficulty voting publicly in the face of opposition from the United States and other powerful countries.

The secret-vote issue is the most controversial of the more than 90 resolutions covering trade in endangered animal and plant species, to be voted on by the 10th conference of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (Cites). The outcome may determine the fate of the African elephant, and the future of whales, tigers, bears and mahogany trees.

"A secret ballot is needed to allow poor African countries to vote freely without fear of pressure from the wealthy Western donor countries," said a Zimbabwean delegate.

On the other side numerous pressure groups, such as Greenpeace and the World Wildlife Fund, oppose a secret ballot of Cites's 138-member countries, and the African move to allow controlled trade in ivory.

"There is a real danger the Cites parties will make some very harmful decisions," said James Gillies of Greenpeace. "If they reduce the level of protection for species of great biological and symbolic importance, such as whales and elephants, it could open the floodgates for wildlife trade, legal and illegal."

More than 1,500 participants have converged on Harare to do battle. Four hundred non-governmental organisations are registered to put forward their viewpoints.

Fatal fade, page 12

China falls out with Blair on Hong Kong

Andrew Higgins

SIGNALLING the end of a hoped-for honeymoon with Tony Blair, China last week lashed out at the new British government after a legal challenge in Hong Kong to the legitimacy of the puppet legislature set up by Beijing to replace the colony's elected assembly when British rule ends at midnight on June 30.

An editorial in the Wen Wei Po newspaper, an authoritative Communist party mouthpiece, accused the British government of "staging a farce" and acting in collusion with "anti-China elements" to "create chaos during the transfer of sovereignty".

The attack was prompted by a decision last week by the colony's high court to grant legal aid to a pensioner who is trying to strike down new statutory restrictions on protests and other legislation being prepared by a shadow legislature handpicked by Beijing.

The court's decision paves the way for a legal battle that could gravely damage the assembly's already badly tainted legitimacy. Likely to be cited as defendant is Rita Fan, head of the provisional legislature and a pro-China politician known in the Hong Kong media as "Madame Mao".

The provisional legislature is already caught in a diplomatic row. Its members and the first chief executive, Tung Chee-hwa, will be sworn in at a pre-dawn ceremony on July 1, immediately after Prince Charles and the last governor, Chris Patten, have left.

The United States secretary of state, Madeleine Albright, and other Western dignitaries may stay away from the swearing-in to avoid conferring credibility on an unelected body. Mr Blair has yet to say if he will travel to Hong Kong for the handover.

The high court's legal aid ruling reversed an earlier decision to reject an application for funds from Ng King-luen, a founding member of Hong Kong's biggest political force, the Democratic party. The pensioner's suit, which is expected to be filed in the next few days, accuses Mrs Fan of usurping the powers of the colony's elected legislature.

The provisional legislature was chosen by 400 pro-China stalwarts and meets in the Chinese border town of Shenzhen. It will replace a legislative council dominated by the Democratic party, which trounced pro-China groups in the 1995 election. China denounced the 1995 vote, which was held under political reforms introduced by Mr Patten, as unfair.

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Aids drugs cut to human 'guinea pigs'

Lucy Johnston and Ruaridh Nicoll in Johannesburg

POOR people in the Third World are having Aids treatments withdrawn after taking part in trials which have proved the success of the new "wonder drugs".

Multinational drugs companies — which conduct the trials and allow their patients to return to risk imminent death — have been condemned as "unethical" by the World Health Organisation.

"In many countries there are no proper ethical standards and companies are exploiting this loophole," said Dr Joseph Saba, of the WHO's United Nations Aids programme. Last weekend, Dr Saba called for the practice to be stopped.

Almost 95 per cent of Aids victims live in the developing world and are not receiving treatment because of drug costs. The new anti-Aids cocktails, tested in the Third World but mainly used in the West, cost up to £49,000 a year per patient and earn millions for the pharmaceutical industry.

An Observer investigation discovered that in South Africa, where 2.4 million people are HIV positive, Aids patients wanted for trials must first agree that they can be taken off costly drugs when the tests are completed. Doctors say many patients cannot read or understand the forms they sign.

Eddie Graham is one. Last Christmas, his immune system had collapsed and he was put forward for trials of the drug Nevirípine, made by the German firm Boehringer Ingelheim. After five months on a cocktail of Lamivudine, Nevirípine and an AZT substitute, Mr Graham's condition improved. He will receive treatments for another 19 months. Then he will again face the prospect of death.

Charles de Wet, medical director of Boehringer Ingelheim, was not available for comment. But in a report by the London-based development group Panos he is quoted as saying that "providing extended free drugs would be very expensive and impractical".

International agreements, such as the Helsinki Declaration of Human Rights, have set guidelines for ethical conduct of medical research, but there is no global mechanism for enforcing them.

Doctors conducting the trials also have a dilemma. "There are many patients who may not survive the next two years without intervention — so at least I can offer them something," said Dr Johnson, who first put Mr. Graham forward for drug trials. "Unfortunately the only way to deal with expenses is by entering clinical trials."

But this was contested by the WHO's Dr Saba, who said "There is no point in doing clinical trials in a country where the drugs will not be available. This needs to be urgently discussed with the countries and the companies concerned, and it needs to be understood from the beginning of the trial." — *The Observer*

Corruption claims shake Lula's party

Candace Piette in São Paulo

BRAZIL'S leftwing Workers' party (PT) and its former presidential candidate, Luiz Inacio "Lula" da Silva, have become ensnared in a corruption scandal — the first time it has faced serious allegations of dishonesty.

One of the most successful leftwing parties in Latin America, the PT became the hope of the left worldwide in Brazil's presidential election three years ago.

The scandal broke after the Jornal da Tarde newspaper published an interview with a PT activist, Paulo de Tarso Venceslau, until 1994 the secretary of finances in a São Paulo state municipality controlled by the party.

He accuses party leaders of employing a company, CPEM, to doctor the books so that the municipality received an increased share of central government funding. He says CPEM was given the work on the recommendation of Roberto Teixeira, a friend and benefactor of Mr Da Silva, the party president.

Mr Da Silva has been living in a house owned by Mr Teixeira for the past eight years. Mr Venceslau, aged 52, says that Mr Teixeira, who was tortured and imprisoned by the military dictatorship in the early 1970s for his participation in the kidnapping of a United States ambassador, used his friendship with Mr Da Silva to put pressure on other PT municipalities to use CPEM's services.

The income generated, Mr Venceslau says, helped fund the PT's 1994 presidential election campaign. He says that he wrote to the party's directorate at the time revealing the irregularities, but received no response.

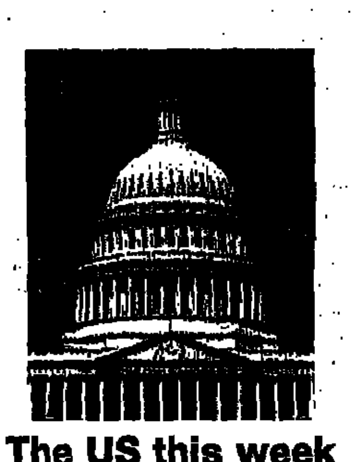
The scandal has damaged the party, according to opinion polls commissioned by newspapers in São Paulo, the PT's heartland. They show a sharp drop in public confidence in the party and in Mr Da Silva — one of the few politicians seen as a realistic contender to run against the current president, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, in next year's election.

"The party already has serious internal problems, including factional disputes, and a lack of ideas to compete with President Cardoso's Social Democrat government," says one Brasilia-based political scientist, Walder de Goes.

Like most analysts, Mr De Goes believes that the scandal has not eliminated Mr Da Silva from the political scene, only weakened him. However, many analysts believe that in the long term the consequences for the Workers' party may be serious.

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High command and low morals



The US this week

Martin Walker

PRESUMABLY it is called adultery because it is something that adults do. And on sober reflection, many of us would choose to pity someone whose life has been so drab that they have not, at some time, made an utter fool of themselves over sex. The human genetic system seems to be wired that way.

But the social wiring of the United States has gone into an extraordinary overload in the past week, with fuses blown, lawyers involved, lobby groups rampant and worthy public figures chased down their office corridors by gangs of reporters and TV cameras, in that characteristic American feeding frenzy which leaves reputations smashed and careers endangered.

This may come as a shock to readers of a delicate disposition, but it must be admitted that a senior US air force general once slept with someone who was not his wife while he was still technically married. Dreadful, is it not? Can the West sleep safely, knowing that the man once thought most likely to be the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff at the Pentagon is a confessed adulterer?

This latest brouhaha began because the US defence secretary, William Cohen, tried to end the long and bruising controversy over sex in the US military by saying that he wanted to retain a confessed adulterer as the top candidate to succeed General John Shalikashvili as the top military man at the Pentagon. "It is time to draw a line," Cohen said, complaining of a frenzy of sex-related scandals which have rocked the US military. "We need to come back to a rule of reason instead of a rule of thumb."

Air Force General Joseph Ralston, aged 53, currently vice-chairman of the joint chiefs, admitted to Cohen that 13 years ago, while estranged from his wife, he had an affair with a woman CIA officer. He then tried a brief and unsuccessful reconciliation with his wife, whom he later divorced. He has since remarried, but his former wife said last week that she knew "of nobody more qualified" to take over the top job in the US military.

"I remain firm in my belief that Gen Ralston would make a fine chairman of the joint chiefs," Gen Shalikashvili said of the career officer he was backing to succeed him, despite the competing claims of the US Marine General John Sheehan, who is known as a maverick and reforming intellectual soldier. But Gen Ralston withdrew from the race when he realised that Congress *would not* approve his appointment.

The real issue here ought to have been the choice between Gen Sheehan, who has some bold and persuasive ideas about the way the world's only superpower should reorganise its armed forces for the next century, and Gen Ralston. He is a more conventional figure, content to leave big ideas and speeches about grand reforms to the politicians, while he would continue running the Pentagon as it has traditionally operated.

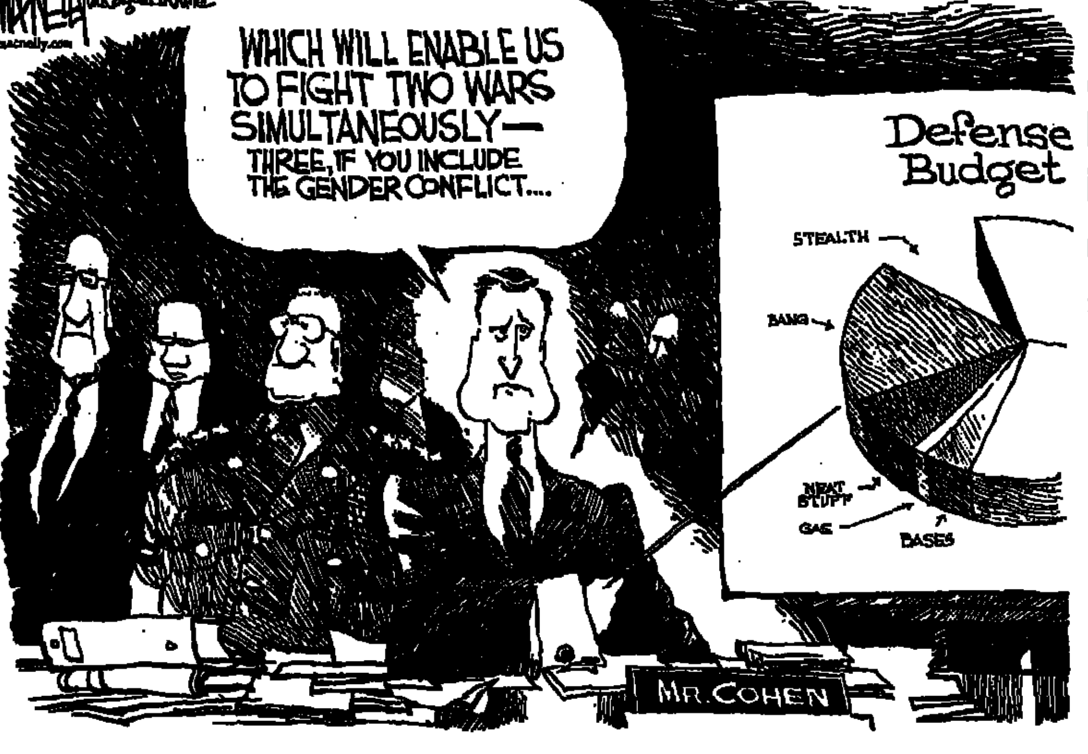
The choice should be the occasion for a serious debate about the impact of what the soldiers call RMA — the Revolution in Military Affairs. This begins with the astonishing changes which information technology, remote sensing and superfast communications are bringing to the battlefield. Pilotless spy planes, and communications and spy satellites are between them clearing away the traditional fog of war. With the coming of "smart" weaponry, the massive US investment in tanks, aircraft carriers and exceedingly expensive warplanes looks unpleasantly vulnerable.

Instead, the nation is talking about adultery. This is not entirely the fault of the Pentagon, even though the military do seem to be following the old 1960s slogan, "Make love, not war", with awesome zeal. Bill Clinton's colourful past has something to do with it, as does the hideously embarrassing lawsuit brought against him for sexual harassment by Paula Jones, and the entirely sound and unanimous Supreme Court verdict, by nine votes to nil, that the president is not above the civil law and there is no constitutional reason why Jones's case should not proceed.

Clinton's predicament has spawned further difficulties for the women's movement, or at least for the professional lobby groups such as the National Organisation for Women. Naturally inclined to support Clinton because he is a Democrat and has fought hard for abortion rights, NOW has been in something of a pickle over the Paula Jones affair. Usually it would support a sister in distress, but its loyalties are torn, and whatever the merits of her case, Jones is a blatant pawn of Republican mischief-makers. So NOW has had to suffer much waspish criticism for its reticence over the case, which contrasts with its noisy support for Dr Anita Hill when she made her allegations of sexual harassment against Clarence Thomas before he became a Supreme Court justice.

NOW's silence ended last week, thanks to some unguarded remarks by the president's lawyer, Robert Bennett, who suggested that Jones's own sexual past might be relevant in a trial that hinged on her veracity and on the damages she seeks for alleged harm to whatever reputation she might have. Bennett quickly backtracked, saying it was her reputation for truthfulness rather than sexual propriety that was in question. Too late. The damage had been done. NOW had been forced to speak, and to demand of Clinton: "Call off your attack lawyer."

This fuss coincided with the Pentagon's manifold woes over sexual relations, which began at the start of this decade with the Tailhook incident, an annual convention of US navy pilots who let off steam in a Las Vegas hotel with strippers, ladies of easy virtue, drinking mugs shaped like the penis of a rhinoceros and other juvenile paraphernalia. The atmosphere quickly turned orgiastic, a woman staff officer accompanying her admiral was groped by a gauntlet of sozzled aviators, and after prolonged inquiries, a wave of sackings and demotions ensued.



Even as the military was doggedly incorporating women into its ranks, to carry out tasks as dangerous as piloting combat aircraft, sex reared its ugly head again. A group of drill sergeants at the Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland were court-martialled for having sexually preyed on the young women recruits in their charge. One of them, Delmar Simpson, was last month jailed for 25 years after being convicted of 51 counts of rape. Others have been discharged.

The Aberdeen base commander, Major General John Logworth, was last week ordered to retire after admitting that he had had an adulterous and consensual affair with a civilian 10 years ago. This was widely seen by his comrades in arms as a political decision, inspired by the row over the B-52 nuclear bomber pilot, Lieutenant Kelly Flinn. She was discharged from the air force this month after a massive media and political campaign on her behalf narrowly saved her from a court martial on a charge of adultery with a civilian gym instructor who was married to another air force woman.

SIMULTANEOUSLY, the US army's top enlisted man, Sergeant Major Gene McKinney, has been accused of sexual assault and indecent behaviour with four servicewomen. He is now trying to resign with an honourable discharge rather than undergo the inevitable inquiries and a possible court martial.

And now comes Gen Ralston's affair, and the Pentagon's understandable attempt to damp down the current frenzy over sex in the military. At a time when the American media feels it has little else to write about, when the military remains perhaps the best-respected institution in the country, and when the Pentagon is being so blatantly hypocritical about it all, such a damage limitation exercise has proved a difficult task.

The Pentagon always claimed that the real issue for Lt Flinn was less her adultery than the fact that she had lied to her commanding officers about it. Ordered to break off the affair, she said she had, but the liaison continued. Whoops. General Ralston had, until his confessional phone call with the defence secretary, been somewhat economical with the truth about his own extramarital liaison.

Worse still, Gen Ralston had two years ago forced the resignation of Lieutenant-General Tom Griffith, commander of the 12th Air Force and Southern Command Air Forces, who had admitted to an adulterous affair with a civilian he met at an air force conference. Lt-Gen Griffith had to go, the air force said, because Gen Ralston "had lost confidence in Griffith's ability to command due to inappropriate personal conduct".

So the Pentagon is now being dubbed "the Department of double standards", and the politicians are scrambling to the cameras to get their well-honed soundbites on air.

"If Gen Ralston merits a promotion, then Lt Kelly Flinn at least deserves an honourable discharge," said Congressman Charles Schumer, who is hoping to run for the US Senate in New York, where the women's lobby is powerful and its fund-raising essential to any Democratic hopeful.

"This is an Alice-in-Wonderland scenario," added New York congresswoman Nita Lowey. "The same good-old-boy network that has given Gen Ralston a pat on the back gave Kelly Flinn the back of its hand."

The most sensible comment came from the former Vietnam war hero, Senator John McCain, a Republican from Arizona, who noted: "It was a long time ago, and you don't want to crucify him for a single mistake. But it looks inconsistent and I am not trying to rationalise that. If we have hearings on him [the Senate would have to confirm Gen Ralston's appointment to be chairman of the joint chiefs of staff], they will be the best attended in human history and this will run for the rest of the year."

In short, political opinion reckoned that Gen Ralston should start looking for his retirement home, and that Gen Sheehan now has a much better chance of being the first US Marine to chair the joint chiefs. (So he should, but not like this.) But seeping out from all this is something more fundamental, and possibly even useful.

This messy, gossipy and hurtful process represents America thinking aloud about a major social change. This, rather than sonorous speeches by politicians, is the way that modern media democracies hold their public debates. The fuss over sex in the military represents a country coming to grips with what it thinks about gays, women in uniform, sex outside marriage, and the long fallout of the sexual revolution that began in the 1960s.

The University of Chicago's national opinion research centre has traced an interesting development. The number of Americans who morally disapprove of adultery was 69 per cent in 1973, and rose steadily to 79 per cent last year. In that same poll, 18 per cent of Americans confessed to having had adulterous affairs.

"ADULTERY is a word with nice Puritan and puritanical overtones, a great word out of our past," notes David Roozen, of the Centre for Social and Religious Research. He suspects that the coming of Aids, and the growth of the evangelical movement and religious conservatism are combining to change the moral culture.

"We are in the midst of one of the most intense social transitions ever," suggests Ira Lurvey, a lawyer who runs the family law section of the American Bar Association. "We are going from monogamy to something called serial monogamy, and we have no rules or guidelines."

I am not sure about the role of religious conservatism in all this, except that it may add to the general sense of hypocrisy which surrounds the issue. On the day that Gen Ralston was endorsed by the defence secretary, the leading Republican candidate to be the next governor of Georgia resigned his commission as a general in the Air National Guard and confessed that he had enjoyed a 10-year adulterous affair with his secretary.

Michael Bowers, who also resigned as attorney-general of Georgia, is a supporter of the Christian Coalition who became a hero to the religious right when he aggressively defended his state's law against sodomy. He also refused to hire a woman lawyer on to his staff once he discovered she was a lesbian who was about to celebrate a religious "commitment ceremony" with her partner. Under the Georgian state law which Bowers staunchly defends, as under the laws of 26 other states and in US military law, adultery is a crime.

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Quiet revolution tries to raise its voice

COMMENT

John Hooper

IT WAS a neat enough phrase, to be sure. As the old order crumbled in a welter of corruption scandals, someone decided Italy had begun a "quiet revolution".

Public life would be cleaned up by the Milan-based "Clean Hands" prosecutors and their colleagues, and the parties which had monopolised power for half a century would be swept aside.

A Second Republic would be born, rooted in principles which had been shown to work in other parts of the world, most notably Britain. A first-past-the-post election would put an end to short-lived coalition governments, and a freer market would replace the corporatist, cartelistic practices that were strangling Italian enterprise.

As things have turned out, the revolution has been more than quiet: it has been almost inaudible.

The anti-graft campaigners who shook the old, party-based system to its foundations have gradually, but effectively, had their sting drawn. The once-dominant Christian Democrat party may have been consigned to history, but a Christian Democrat is today prime minister.

Proportional representation is still used to allot a quarter of the seats in the two houses of parliament, with the predictable result that one is "hung". The centre-left government cannot therefore pass legislation without the help of either the hard left or the populist-secessionist Northern League. But only a few months ago the constitutional court threw out a proposal that would have allowed voters to decide in a referendum whether they wanted to abolish PR once and for all.

A free market remains more of a dream than reality. Privatisation has not really been used to encourage competitive pressures in the economy. Takeovers and mergers are still decided more often by bankers than shareholders. Strikes are so much a part of life that one newspaper has taken to listing each day's stoppages alongside the exchange rates and the share index.

Last week, however, there was at last an indication that the quiet revolution may happen, and that the Second Republic may finally come into being. After months of wrangling, an *ad hoc* commission of both houses of parliament approved a string of constitutional amendments. Whether its proposals are sound is debatable. The key one would saddle Italy with a presidential arrangement not unlike the one that has just brought France the prospect of an uneasy "cohabitation".

If the proposal survives, the presidents of the Second Republic will be powerful figures indeed: they will be able to dissolve parliament, name the prime minister, vet ministerial appointments, and preside over cabinet meetings.

Turning this idea into reality will not be easy. The amended text of Italy's new constitution will no doubt be amended further on its way through parliament. The final version will then need to be approved twice by both houses and may also need endorsement by the electorate in a referendum. This formidable obstacle course has already proved too much for two earlier attempts at reform.

But this time things may be different — and for reasons that were evident in the way the proposal was passed.

In typically unpredictable fashion, the Northern League, which had boycotted the constitutional reform commission from the outset, descended in force on the crucial day and tipped the balance in favour of the semi-presidential system that is favoured by the right. Reactions on the left ranged from disappointment to apoplectic outrage.

It would be a mistake, though, to see the League's *coup de main* as only the latest example of its mischievous irresponsibility. It was also an effective way of articulating the disdain that so many northerners feel for "Rome" and its interminably inconclusive politicking. Beyond the *palazzi del potere*, Italy's version of the corridors of power, impatience with the failure to deliver real change is growing alarmingly.

Nothing illustrates this better than the aftermath of last month's semi-comic raid on St Mark's Square in Venice. The reactionaries who mounted the operation have begun to act as a focus for more sinister forces.

Last week, outside the court where the defendants were being tried, riot police charged to separate demonstrators for and against the group, in a scene disturbingly reminiscent of the bloody 1970s. The night before, a booby-trap bomb was found attached to a Venetian flag.

Politicians of left and right alike need plenty of reminding that, if they fail to deliver a Second Republic, the First may be brought down by something altogether livelier and nastier than a quiet revolution.

● A military prosecutor in Rome was last week considering new and horrifyingly explicit evidence that Italian United Nations peacekeepers in Somalia tortured suspects.

Photographs published by the weekly news magazine Panorama are the latest stain on the already soiled reputation of "Mission Restore Hope". One shows an Italian officer applying electrodes to the genitals of a supine Somali.

Investigations are already under way in Canada and Belgium, where airborne troops who served in Somalia have been accused of atrocities ranging from murder to the "roasting" of children.

The latest evidence has made a profound impact in Italy, not least because the unit at the centre of the row is serving in another multinational force, this time in Albania.

The retired non-commissioned officer who released the pictures has claimed that fascism was rife among Italy's paratroopers. Michele Patruno, said: "Fascist insignia were on display in some camps, and on parade in the morning a lot [of paratroopers] including officers gave the Roman salute [used by Benito Mussolini]."

Legal fight to end life

Clare Dyer

A WOMAN suffering from the incurable degenerative illness motor neurone disease has filed a ground-breaking application with the High Court for the right to a peaceful and painless death.

In a case which will make legal history, Annie Lindsell, aged 47, has applied for a declaration that her GP may lawfully give her a drug to ease her distress, even though it will probably shorten her life.

The case will reopen the highly charged ethical debate over the rights of patients with terminal illnesses to assistance in ending their lives. At present, doctors who help "ease the passing" risk charges of murder, or aiding and abetting a suicide, which carries a maximum of 14 years' imprisonment. It is a legal grey area in which Parliament has so far been reluctant to tread.

Ms Lindsell, from southwest London, was diagnosed five years ago with the disease, which destroys the nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord, causing progressive paralysis. It usually kills within five years.

Ms Lindsell wants to live as long as she feels she has a reasonable quality of life, and her lawyers stress that she is not seeking court approval for voluntary euthanasia. But she is anxious not to have to endure the terminal stages, when death comes by suffocation.



Clowning around . . . Britain's conquest of European fashion continues. The designer Sean McGowan is the latest star to move to Paris. He will work for Karl Lagerfeld and Chanel PHOTO: JEFF MOORE

Camelot surrenders over pay

Julia Finch

THE showdown between the Heritage Secretary, Chris Smith, and the three lottery directors at the centre of the pay and bonuses row ended in victory for the Government last week.

The directors — chief executive Tim Holley, communications head David Rigg and finance chief Peter Murphy — agreed after five days of haggling to hand over part of their annual bonuses to charity. They had earlier threatened to resign rather than give in to Mr Smith's demands that they donate some of the cash to good causes. Camelot will add £2 million to the director's personal donations from its profits.

In addition, the lottery operator agreed to pay to good causes the interest accumulated on unclaimed prizes. Some £6 million is currently held as part of Camelot's profits, but the lottery group's chairman, Sir George Russell, said the company had pledged to hand over the cash until its licence expires in 2001. It should total £24 million.

Mr Smith promptly welcomed Camelot's "positive proposals" and said he now regarded the matter as closed. The deal was rubber-stamped by Camelot's shareholders: Cadbury Schweppes, banknote printer De La Rue, electronics group Racal and computer companies GTech and ICL.

It is understood that the Prime Minister's aides urged Mr Smith and the Camelot directors to find a sensible solution. The Government has worked hard to win business friends and did not want to see its efforts wrecked by one pay row. It was also understood to be concerned that the success of the lottery could have been jeopardised.

The deal had face-saving elements to appease the directors, who had been branded "fat cats" for their 40 per cent pay rises and bonuses totalling £700,000 — they will not make their donations until the autumn, and the amounts and the charities involved will remain confidential. Mr Smith will not be informed how much the men are giving, but they will be monitored by an independent Camelot director.

The Heritage Secretary said: "The precise amount will be a matter for personal decision, but I am confident that there will be substantial amounts going to charity as a result of this. I believe this is an exercise in good faith by Camelot."

A spokesman for Camelot said: "This is a great solution for all parties. Everyone comes out of it very well and we now have a platform to build on and move forward".

Camelot will soon start investigating how the lottery could be run on a not-for-profit basis, a concept the Government is committed to when Camelot's licence expires in 2001.

Guide tells of grim and grubby Britain

Sue Quinn

BRITAIN may boast the "coolest" city in the world as its capital, but it has some of the grimmest buildings on the planet and is inhabited by people with peculiar accents and obsessive hobbies, according to a travel guide. And they do not like running water either.

The verdict of the best-selling Lonely Planet company's latest guide on Britain is that Wales is "England's unloved backyard", Coventry is a "dismal city" and London's Piccadilly Circus is "fume-choked and uninspiring".

The British also "don't understand that a good shower is one of life's basic essentials" according to the guide, compiled by two Britons, an Irishman, a Zimbabwean and an Australian.

But it adds that Britain remains "one of the most beautiful islands in the world" and that there are so many positive features, it is prepared to list the negatives.

Accents: "Some can be virtually impenetrable. It's OK to ask someone to repeat what they have said, but try not to laugh."

Hobbies: "No country in the world has more obsessive hobbyists, who very often teeter on the edge of complete madness."

Wales: "Breathtakingly beautiful in parts, but a suitable place for mines and nuclear power stations."

Coventry: "A dismal cityscape of car parks, ring roads and windswept shopping precincts."

Beaches: "A truly magnificent coastline . . . But most overseas visitors do not think of Britain for a beach holiday and there are good reasons for this."

Lonely Planet's spokeswoman, Jennifer Cox, said: "As Britons, we are often critical of other countries, but we get very cross if people are critical of us."

The Week in Britain James Lewis

Labour rules out honours for political time-servers

THE QUEEN'S Birthday Honours List, to be published this weekend, will not contain the usual knighthoods and other honours for compliant and long-serving MPs who have failed to make it to high office. The Prime Minister has reverted to the policy adopted by his Labour predecessors — Harold Wilson and James Callaghan — of not recommending any such awards.

The recipients will have been recommended by John Major. But civil servants had advised him of Mr Blair's stance, so he omitted political nominees. He will publish his personal resignation honours list next month, after the Tory leadership election, when he will reward party stalwarts and probably award peerages to former ministers who lost their seats.

Harold Wilson first dispensed with awards for political service in 1966, though he continued to give them to councillors. Edward Heath reversed the policy when he took office in 1970, but Wilson reinstated it in 1974, only to be derided later for his "lavender list" resignation honours which scattered awards like confetti on old cronies.

Since Margaret Thatcher's election victory in 1979, no fewer than 133 Tory MPs have been knighted. Mr Major tried to include more awards for "ordinary people" and fewer for civil servants. But gongs continued to go to party backers, and the reforms had few significant effects.

Many Labour stalwarts would like to see the whole honours system scrapped, but it would take a brave government to deny baubles to humble toilers whose work for charity and other good causes would otherwise go unsung.

Comment, page 12

A SQUAD of up to 20 detectives was threatened with jail for contempt of court when a major drugs trial collapsed because of the destruction of vital evidence. In an astonishing attack on a team of officers from the Southeast regional crime squad, Judge Fergus Mitchell warned that, if a current police inquiry into the officers' conduct was unsatisfactory, he would instigate an investigation himself.

Prosecuting counsel, Sir Derek Spencer QC, said that charges against five men accused of conspiring to supply cannabis resin were being dropped for two reasons. First, because one of the officers involved had been described by the Court of Appeal as a liar whose evidence could not be relied on as truthful; but crucially because police surveillance logs had disappeared immediately after the defence had requested them for analysis.

The only reasonable explanation, said Sir Derek, was that a member of the squad had removed the logs to avoid electronic tests which might show they were not contemporaneous. Judge Mitchell said: "A little conspiracy was hatched, and they were destroyed." It was, in his view, a contempt of court. "I suppose I could send them all to prison . . . from the superintendent down."

PUPILS who have failed to reach the required level of reading ability at the age of 11 will this year be offered 50 hours' extra tuition at summer schools before they move on to secondary education.

The school standards minister, Stephen Byers, said there would be 29 pilot schools this year, mostly in inner-city areas, with places for 870 pupils. Next year he hoped there would be thousands of such schools, perhaps covering maths as well.

Each school will be staffed by at least one qualified teacher, helped by assistants, parents or older children. Attendance will not be compulsory, though sport, competitions and days out will be offered as incentives to attend.

COSMETIC surgery performed on children with Down's syndrome to make them look "more normal" sparked disputes between parents, who welcomed the improvement, and campaigning groups such as Mencap, and the Down's Syndrome Association, which argued that society must learn to accept the children's distinctive features.

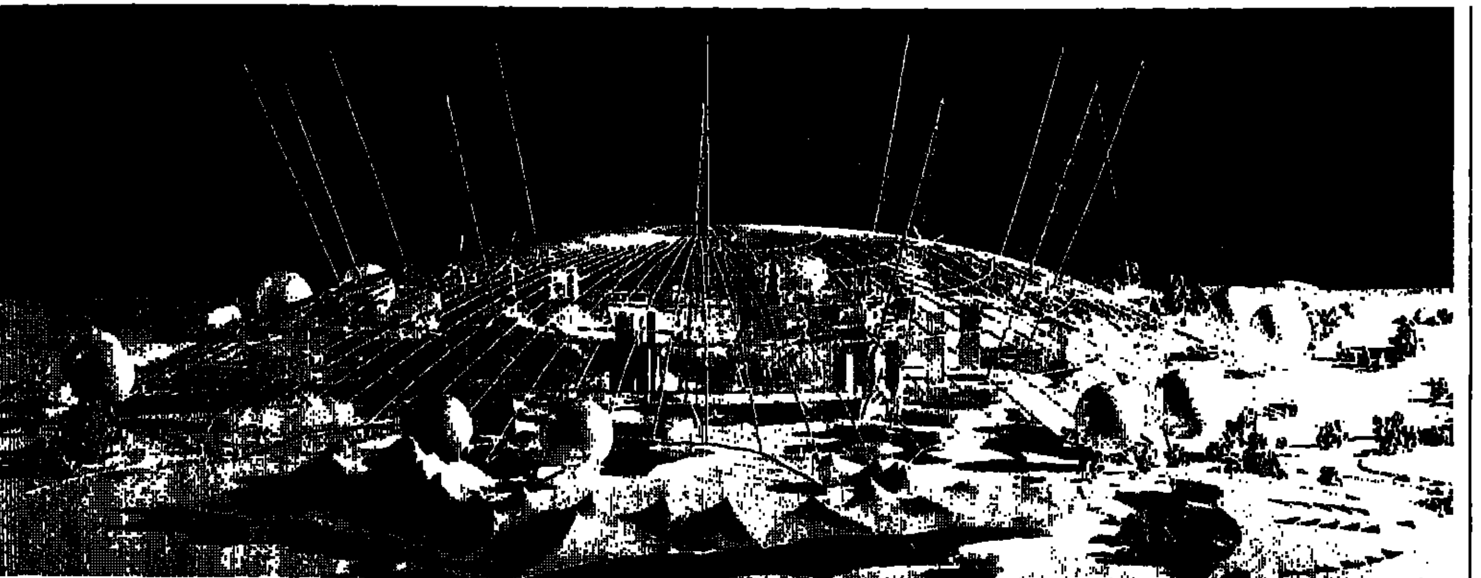
Not every plastic surgeon will operate on a Down's syndrome child. But some operations, on children as young as three, have been carried out to shorten tongues, and to remove the flaps of skin that give the distinctive almond shape to the eyes of sufferers.

Norman Waterhouse, who carried out an operation at London's Chelsea and Westminster Hospital, said that "if we can dilute the obvious features of Down's syndrome, and reduce the possibility of bullying and teasing at school; then I feel that's well worth it". But a Mencap official countered that it was "appalling that some parents are forced to consider surgery because of the very open prejudices of society towards anyone who looks different".

PROTOTYPES of the famous "bouncing bombs" which enabled the RAF to breach the German Mohne and Eder dams during the second world war were found in the sea off Reculver, in Kent, where they were originally tested by their inventor, Barnes Wallis.

The four prototypes — the largest weighing 9,000lb — were rolled ashore and winched up the beach by army engineers, and will be displayed in museums. The inventor went on to help develop Concorde before he died in 1979.



WITH its white pyramids, giant golf balls, towering support masts and an enormous "umbrella", it resembles a city in space, *writes Sue Quinn.*

Architect Richard Rogers has revealed his model for the Millennium Dome planned to be built on a derelict site in Greenwich, London, as the focus of Britain's celebrations in 2000. It will be the world's largest supported dome, big enough to contain 50,000 people and 12 Albert Halls.

Millennium Central, the operator of the project, has started work on detailed briefs for the design of the exhibition inside the dome. After two years, the company is committed to dismantling the dome made of PVC-coated polyester, and favours turning the site into a sports city.

Fury over Railtrack profits

Keith Harper and Roger Cowe

RAILTRACK last week faced a furious two-pronged attack from the Government and the rail regulator for failing to invest in the industry while enjoying a 60 per cent rise in profits on the back of the taxpayer.

The move symbolises Labour's determination to stamp its authority on the privatised sector of the economy, which it believes has gone for excessive profits and dividends rather than investing in Britain's infrastructure.

The Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, gave a public dressing-down to Railtrack's chairman, Sir Robert Horton, for increasing the company's half-year profits to more than £300 million. The high profits could make it a candidate for Gordon Brown's windfall tax.

Ministers are seeking to act through the regulators to attack the "fat cat" culture. There is difficulty in acting directly now the companies are publicly quoted.

Mr Prescott told Railtrack, which runs tracks and signals, that it should no longer put the well-being of its shareholders above those of the taxpayer. The Government has particular sway over the rail network as its subsidies are supporting the industry by more than £1.5 billion a year.

The transport minister, Gavin Strang, said that the industry was under-investing and that the Government was determined to bring about a change through increased regulation. The threat is mainly aimed at Railtrack, but it is also directed at the train operating-companies.

The public carpeting could put Sir Robert's job as chairman in jeopardy. As head of a privatised company, he cannot be dismissed by the Government. He has seen the organisation through a difficult period and was rewarded with a knighthood by the outgoing Conservative government. But the vehemence of the criticism against him may make it difficult for him to hang on even though his contract was renewed in March.

The rail regulator, John Swift, will make it clear that he will seek tougher controls against Railtrack if its investment record does not improve. He has already expressed dissatisfaction with an underspend of £700 million.

The water regulator, Ian Byatt, also warned the water companies that he will take action to claw back unjustified dividend rises.

John Battle, the energy minister, sent a jolt through the electricity and gas industries by saying he would give regulators powers to eradicate fuel poverty — affecting an estimated 3 million households — and would not let companies disregard their plight.

Railtrack's shares have soared since its debut on the stock market in May last year as City analysts have looked forward to surging profits and dividends. Launched at 360p, the shares reached a peak of 684p in March and have remained near that level.

Analysts have warned that Labour poses a threat to the company, but the general view is that even with a tougher regime the company will be able to satisfy the City.

Soaring profits at Railtrack, which will help trigger future bonus payments, are also likely to feed the outcry over directors' bonuses in monopoly industries. Bonuses have soared up the political agenda as a result of the huge payments to Camelot directors.

Call to cut emissions

SACRIFICES must be made by industry and motorists to meet Britain's target of a 20 per cent cut in carbon dioxide emissions by 2010, Michael Meacher, the environment minister, said last week, *writes Paul Brown.*

Climate change, the threat of rising sea levels and damage to agriculture and water supply must be tackled. "We cannot deny climate change, ignore it or hope it will go away," he said.

Mr Meacher was speaking at a World Wide Fund for Nature conference ahead of the Climate Change Convention in Japan in December. Many countries, including the United States, have failed to set post-2000 targets.

He criticised oil companies who belonged to the Global Climate Coalition, a group which he said had done its best to undermine the science of global warming. He praised BP, which has just resigned from the coalition, and its chief executive, John Brown, who has endorsed the development of solar power.

Prescott plan to curb car

Paul Brown

A PLAN to ration road space for cars and give buses express corridors through city centres is part of Labour's blueprint to reform the transport system, the Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, said last week.

De-regulation of bus services will be reversed and local authorities given power to link timetables and make sense of the current chaos in public transport, he said.

A transport white paper will be published next spring after widespread public consultation. "I will have failed in this if in five years there are not many more people using public transport and far fewer journeys by car. It is a tall order but I want you to hold me to it," he said.

In a wide-ranging speech at the Royal Geographical Society in London on World Environment Day last week Mr Prescott won loud applause from the audience of environment and industry groups meeting to discuss the UN's Earth Summit plus five years meeting in New York this month.

With his civil servants in tow, Mr Prescott took the Tube from his office in Victoria to South Kensington and walked to the conference.

The fundamental transport review was the main plank of his speech, but Mr Prescott also stressed that "green" taxes to curb pollution and discriminate against larger cars would be considered.

Mr Prescott said: "Tax is not a popular word. But environmental taxes can encourage industry to find cost-effective, innovative ways of reducing pollution. They can be particularly attractive if they provide revenue which may be used to reduce other taxes, or recycled in other ways."

Whatever the environmental concern, the Government had to ensure "that the polluter bears the cost of measures required".

Domestic priorities included reducing the use of harmful chemicals, which are hitting animal and bird populations and interfering with sex hormones.

"I believe the time is right for stepping back a pace and developing a more strategic overview of the whole question of chemicals in the environment," Mr Prescott said.

Cyclist is king, page 24

In Brief

UNSCRUPULOUS "immigration consultants" who charge extortionate fees to pursue bogus asylum claims are to face new controls under a package unveiled by Jack Straw, the Home Secretary.

THE former cabinet minister Jonathan Aitken has begun his libel case over allegations printed in the Guardian and broadcast on Granada TV. It is the first libel case brought by a senior politician over his conduct while in office without a jury.

A £150 MILLION compensation scheme for gun owners has been approved by Parliament ahead of the ban on larger calibre handguns which comes into effect next month.

AFTER four years in a Thai jail, convicted drug smuggler Sandra Gregory has begun the rest of her 25-year sentence in Britain under a transfer treaty.

THE Labour party team investigating allegations of bribery and vote-rigging against the Glasgow MP Mohammed Sarwar is set to recommend disciplinary action against him.

MORE THAN 100 Labour MPs called for the outlawing of fox hunting, a move likely to add pressure for a free vote.

NEARLY 6 million part-time workers will have equal legal rights with full-timers within two years following an agreement in Brussels between European employers and trade unions under the Social Chapter.

THOUSANDS of former Chatham dockyard workers who may have been exposed to nuclear radiation while refitting Royal Navy submarines are to be offered medical counselling. But many of those affected are considering legal action.

A WOMAN aged 54 has become the oldest test-tube mother in Britain after giving birth to twins at a London hospital.

MICHAEL HICKEY, one of the Bridgewater Four, was released on bail at Birmingham magistrates' court after being charged with stealing a ring and possessing a machete.

TWO protesters voluntarily emerged from the deep Cakehole tunnel on the site of Manchester Airport's second runway after 10 nights underground — including Denise who is three months pregnant. Two others remain far down the 80ft tunnel, behind locked doors.

RONNIE LANE, bassist, songwriter and co-founder of The Small Faces and The Faces, died at the age of 51 after a long struggle with multiple sclerosis.



Thatcher's weak inheritance

COMMENT
Hugo Young

THE most unattended void in the long ascendancy of Thatcherism was its failure to give birth to anything but second-rate politicians. Margaret Thatcher did not nurture one transcendent disciple, nor even a group of followers who could generally be seen as possessing leadership potential. This is why the country was led from 1990 to 1997 by John Major. It is also why the contest to succeed him presents such an unconvincing spectacle, dominated by people who had years to make their mark and universally failed to do so.

The Thatcher period did produce plenty of adequate place-men, ready slavishly to do the leader's business. But of charisma, of largeness, of public awe, it seems she drained the rightwing pot all by herself. The residue is a collection of policy nerds and sectarian obsessives whose unifying characteristic is to have by-passed any recognisable connection with the British public.

Peter Lilley was 10 years in the government, seven in the Cabinet, yet his percentage recognition-score among the public always stayed in the low singles. He has not a particle of the raw material necessary for leadership. Meanwhile Michael Howard, in government for 12 years and Cabinet for seven, is proud to be located somewhere between fear and loathing in the public mind.

John Redwood is a slightly different case. Two years of liberation from office, following his leadership challenge in 1995, gave him every opportunity to impose himself on the public imagination. Somehow this didn't happen, and the measure of the failure of all three of these Thatcherites has been the emergence of a fourth, William Hague, who is proof not of the party's boldness but its utter desperation.

After 23 years running the party, this is Thatcherism's meagre inheritance. Whatever else may be said against the former Chancellor, Kenneth Clarke, he starts off with an advantage which only the most clap-eyed sectarian could ignore. There is evidence of a certain bonding with the electorate. Clarke has conducted much the most confident leadership campaign. He is the only one who knows how to land a blow on the pretensions of the Government, perhaps because he ran one of the few ministries whose record over the past four years nobody could complain about. Presenting himself for leadership, he shows no signs of the self-invention that preoccupies the rival candidates of the right.

Even over Europe, the cards could be falling his way. Neither the French election nor the predicaments of Helmut Kohl mean that integrationism will cease to be the big topic. But with a single-currency delay more probable, and turbulence swirling round the whole EU project, the case for a flexible, experienced politician, rather than an icy mind that knows exactly what a phobic god tells it to believe, may appeal to rather more of the schemers.

If Clarke won, it would signal the Conservative party's return to sanity much sooner than anyone expects. But low-octane performance isn't the right's only problem. They also can't agree between themselves. The MPs could yet find themselves incapable of deciding which is the least second-rate, and go, *faute de mieux*, for the only first-rate man among them. It would be the right epitaph on the weakness of the Thatcher era if the party selected the leader whose victory its heroine would most hate to see.

Clarke tops poll

IN THE leadership contest, in which Tory MPs were voting on Tuesday, Kenneth Clarke is the public's runaway favourite, according to a Guardian/ICM poll. At 31 per cent, he is more than 22 points ahead of his nearest rival, William Hague. In a poll that echoed the views of Tory constituency chairmen, the three rightwing candidates — John Redwood, Peter Lilley and Michael Howard — won only 21 per cent public support.

Mowlam bans paramilitaries

David Sharrock

MO MOWLAM, the Northern Ireland Secretary, last week banned two new paramilitary groups as she warned that the divisive issue of how to deal with paramilitary weapons must be resolved within weeks if the best opportunity of a political settlement for a generation is not to be lost.

The breakaway republican Continuity Army Council and the mid-Ulster based Loyalist Volunteer Force were outlawed under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act, 1996, which came into effect on June 4.

The CAC blew up the Killyhevlin Hotel in Enniskillen last July and abandoned a car bomb in Belfast earlier this year.

The LVF is suspected of the murder last month of Sean Brown, stalwart of the Gaelic Athletics Association, and claimed it planted a device which failed to explode in Dundalk earlier this month.

Ms Mowlam's tough statement to political parties at the Stormont talks venue appeared to anger David Trimble, the Ulster Unionist leader, who accused the Government of a parallel talks process with Sinn Fein in spite of renewed IRA activity.

Speaking as the Stormont all-party talks resumed in a deteriorating atmosphere of sectarian violence, Ms Mowlam reinforced the Government's determination to push the peace process forward but without giving a specific deadline or explaining what she will do if the parties still fail to agree on illegal arms.

Mr Trimble, hinting that Ulster Unionist agreement on arms would be contingent upon Sinn Fein exclusion, said he wanted to hear just how Ms Mowlam intends to get her "settlement train" moving.

Ms Mowlam refused to rule out an already agreed third meeting between government officials and Sinn Fein, even though the IRA attempted to lure security forces to a 1,000lb bomb last weekend.

Sinn Fein turned up at Stormont on Tuesday last week to hand in letters of protest at their exclusion and to be photographed behind barred gates. But Dick Spring, the Irish foreign minister, said they had "the key in their pocket" to entry: a restored IRA ceasefire.

Howard speaks up for constititinill dissinsy

PARLIAMENTARY SKETCH
Simon Hoggart

BUSINESS opened with a moment of agonising suspense. The Labour whip Janet Anderson appeared before the Speaker with a message from the Queen. It appears that the House had sent a loyal address to Her Maj, thanking her for her most gracious address. (They are all the "most gracious"; they never thank her for a slightly less gracious address than usual.)

The Queen, we learned, had been most grateful for their gratitude. A low cheer rumbled up. Then Ms Anderson, who was carrying a wand of office almost as tall as she is, had to walk backwards, ceremonially bowing the while. Unfortunately she was wearing heels.

She wobbled sternwards for a few steps. MPs held their breath. She rocked to a standstill and bowed. Her colleagues cheered. Still facing north, she set off south again. For a few more steps she swayed like a mizzen mast in a gale, before juddering to a halt and bowing again. The cheers redoubled. She somehow struggled backwards again, bowed perilously, then reached the safety of the Bar of the House, and faced forward to jubilant applause. Then she fell over (or should have done).

Later the House debated the guillotine which is cutting short debate on the Referendum Bill. This has been the cause of much fake outrage from the Tories. Quite why they are making such a fuss, I cannot say. In five years, I doubt that voters will be saying: "By 'eck, I were prepared to give that Labour lot a chance. But when they started mucking around wi' a Timetable Motion on the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill, I thought, 'ey-up! This is a gross infringement of our constitutional liberties!"

Donald Dewar made an amusing short speech in which he pointed out that, in the Tories' place, he would have done exactly the same as them. (In fact, the Conservatives had tabled 250 amendments, 25 New Clauses, 12 New Schedules, the Book of Mormon and this spring's Argos catalogue — I may have made some of those up.)

Michael Howard rose to reply. He invoked history. The Government was on "the path first trodden by that great socialist, Robespierre, who also had a love for the guillotine". It was "the action of an arrogant government which holds Parliament in contempt!" — and we all thought, "coming from him?"

Mr Howard has stopped pronouncing all his vowels like the letter "I". Either he has taken speech lessons, or else someone has removed the ceremonial truncheon of state from up his backside. But it comes back when he gets excited. So we were able to enjoy "constititinill significinz" and "kintimpt for dissinsy".

Next Tam Dalyell stood up. Tam is the man who first gave us the West Lothian Question. Last week he produced a yet more terrifying quandary: the Gary McAllister Problem. Mr McAllister is a Scottish footballer, the captain of his country. But he plays for Coventry. Will he get a referendum vote?

And what about Gazza, an Englishman who works in Scotland? Eh? The Gascoigne Conundrum could keep Tam going for years.

Job loss warning over Eurofighter

Chris Barrie and Ian Traynor in Bonn

PRIME Minister Tony Blair and the German chancellor, Helmut Kohl, were warned last week by union leaders that 250,000 jobs in Europe will be at risk if the Eurofighter project does not go ahead.

MSF, the general union, and Germany's powerful metalworkers' union IG Metall, warned that cancellation of the plane will have a devastating effect on jobs. Germany is struggling to find the funds to prevent the project's collapse.

The unions' declaration came as the Defence Secretary, George Robertson, visiting Bonn, stressed that Labour was as strongly committed to the expensive and high-prestige aircraft project as the Major government.

On his first official visit to Germany, Mr Robertson pushed the Eurofighter issue to the top of his agenda with his Bonn counterpart, Volker Rühe.

German aerospace executives meanwhile warned they would ditch the £40 billion project unless they received a "clear signal" from the cash-strapped government on the project's funding by next month.

The unions believe that in Britain and Germany alone 4,000 skilled jobs are at stake in the development and manufacture of jet engines. Across Europe, work on the design and manufacture of components will support another 42,000 jobs.

British industry will make the front end of the aircraft, the cockpit, much of the avionics and the small stabilising wings at the front.

British Aerospace (BAe), the leading British contractor, estimates that up to 16,000 jobs will depend on the Eurofighter at peak production from 2005. Another 80,000 jobs will be dependent on supporting that work.

BAe indicated that Eurofighter's impact on employment would be felt across the country. But it is also clear that some regions, such as the Northwest, are especially dependent on military projects.

Mr Rühe said he was confident the necessary funds to secure the project's survival for the next four years would be found. But the expenditure battle between Germany's defence and finance ministries has been running for several months, and Mr Rühe made plain that he had not yet won it.

The finance minister, Theo Waigel, faced a confidence vote in parliament last week over the budget mess. He won, but announced a spending freeze. Mr Rühe said the freeze would not affect Eurofighter funds.

His support for the project was echoed by Mr Robertson, who said the advanced fighter scheme was "very clearly high on our agenda . . . We look forward to decisions soon in Germany."

The German Aerospace Industries Association warned it had run out of patience with the government and demanded a cabinet decision giving the green light to Eurofighter production before the summer recess. It also demanded an affirmation of Germany's intent to procure 180 of the aircraft. Otherwise, German industry would pull out at a colossal cost in jobs and prestige.

Mr Rühe indicated that July 11, when Mr Waigel has to present his draft budget for next year, would be the crunch time for the Eurofighter. But the project could yet run into trouble with the opposition in the budget and defence committees.

EU beef ban threatened

Ewen MacAskill

THE GOVERNMENT'S honeymoon with Brussels came to an abrupt end last week when the agriculture minister, Jack Cunningham, issued a surprise ultimatum threatening to ban beef imports from European Union countries unless they met the same stringent anti-BSE — mad cow disease — measures applied to Britain.

After six weeks in which Labour has conducted a love-in with Europe, Mr Cunningham switched tactics, adopting a tough approach that could lead to confrontation with Germany and other EU partners.

Mr Cunningham said that if they had not come to a decision by July 22, when there is a meeting of European agriculture ministers, he will impose a unilateral ban on the import of beef from countries regarded as unsafe.

John Major embarked on a "beef war" last year in an attempt to get the EU ban on British beef lifted but had to abandon it after failing to secure any relaxation.

Although Britain cannot export beef to the rest of the EU, other EU countries have continued to export beef to Britain. Mr Cunningham said: "I thought it was an absurd situation that, with all the rigorous controls on beef in this country, we are importing beef that was not subject to the same safeguards."

About 25 per cent of beef consumed in Britain is imported from overseas, but only Ireland, the Netherlands and France have imposed stringent rules similar to Britain. Germany, one of the biggest exporters to Britain, would be hit by the ban as it allows into the food chain parts of the carcasses banned in Britain.

For some time European Commission veterinary surgeons have been warning that the scale of BSE on the continent is far greater than member states in the EU are prepared to acknowledge.

Like the Ministry of Agriculture, they are convinced that France, Germany, the Netherlands, the Irish Republic, and other countries are under-reporting BSE by accident (there is no uniform system for detecting the disease) or by design.

An EU committee of vets recently reported there could have been 1,700 cases in Europe, rather than the 290 officially recorded, but British scientists believe the figure could be higher. In Britain there have been 165,000 cases.

Israel must trade land for peace

SIX SHORT days in June, three long decades ago, changed the face of the Middle East. Outside the region, hardly anyone noticed last week's anniversary of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. But Israel's Likud prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, remembered the date, making clear in a speech that he was as committed as ever to holding on to East Jerusalem and spelling out in a briefing to his cabinet how he saw the final shape of a settlement with the Palestinians.

Strikingly, it contained little that was new: it was in 1968 that a Labour party leader, Yigal Allon, sketched a map that would see Israel keeping Arab Jerusalem, the Jordan valley, Jewish settlements and strategic roads, with autonomy for the Palestinians living under Israel's then brand-new occupation. Since then peace has broken out with Egypt and Jordan, and though the scale of occupation has been reduced, the 1993 Oslo agreement with the Palestinians remains dangerously stuck.

Palestinians have no doubt who is to blame: no negotiations have taken place between Israel and Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority since Mr Netanyahu sent in the bulldozers to build the new settlement of Har Homa in East Jerusalem in March, breaching the spirit if not the letter of Oslo. His goal was transparently clear: to close the circle round the city before negotiating a final deal. Redeploying Israeli forces from Hebron in January seemed to be the limit of what his coalition of rightwing and religious parties was prepared to do. A further West Bank withdrawal, decided unilaterally, was rejected by Mr Arafat as insultingly limited. Apart from the terrorist bomb that killed three women in a Tel Aviv café, not much has happened since to shatter the uneasy calm.

This is unlikely to last, which is why there is now a burst of diplomatic activity by Egypt and the European Union aimed at getting Mr Netanyahu down from his Jerusalem tree, though only the United States is likely to have the clout actually to coax him on to the ladder.

The Israeli leader has long made clear his contempt for the piecemeal approach that made Oslo work until Yitzhak Rabin's assassination and the Likud's election victory last year. Yet moving straight to final status talks seems impossible given the nadir in relations with the Palestinians. Some hope Mr Netanyahu may be tempted to change by the Labour leadership win for Ehud Barak. He is a popular former general who could be a partner in a new national unity coalition government that would have a wide enough base to be able to offer more generous terms for a settlement.

Palestinians are not beyond criticism in this grim period: the killing of Arabs suspected of selling land to Jews, apparently ordered by Mr Arafat's own security chiefs, is unacceptable. So are random and undemocratic brutalities such as the recent arrest of a journalist who dared to film the debates of the Palestinian parliament. But if the peace caravan is to move on, Israelis need to show a clear willingness to surrender more land. Thirty years on, something has to give.

No time for more excuses in Ireland

HAVE civil-war politics returned to haunt Ireland? That was the early view of some political commentators in Dublin last weekend, scrambling to make sense of the election results. The big winners were the old adversaries, Eamon de Valera's Fianna Fail and Michael Collins's Fine Gael. Labour, the only governing party of the republic to boast that it is not a product of Ireland's war of independence, was trounced, bucking the trend of Britain and France. With the "rainbow coalition" shattered and Labour's leader Dick Spring set against striking deals with Fianna Fail, the left is faced with a period of opposition, a time to reflect on its future role.

Sleaze — of which there has been plenty about — never broke through as an issue. Fine Gael had the most to lose but its vote actually rose by 3.5 per cent, and Michael Lowry, who left the party when the whiff of allegations about his private finances became too ripe, topped the poll in his constituency. And then there was Sinn Fein, the only all-Ireland party in this election with real cross-border support, which proved that the peace process and Northern Ireland are issues in the lives of the smug Southerners after all. What a long slog it has been for Gerry Adams since getting rid of his party's abstentionist policy in 1986 to now. But what a poignant moment it will be, for everyone, when Caoimhghin O Caolain, who beat all the long-established parties to first place in the border constituency of Cavan-Monaghan, takes his seat inside Leinster House, the first Sinn Feiner since the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 to enter the hated "Free State" parliament.

And yet, looking at the make-do victory of Bertie Ahern, the old charge of "civil-war politics" seems suddenly pointless. The differences between Fianna Fail and Fine Gael are negligible nowadays, just as British voters were hard-pushed to see much daylight between the policies of John Major and Tony Blair. Indeed, in important respects the youthful Mr Ahern has performed the Irish equivalent of Mr Blair's transformation of Labour. Heavy on smiles and handshakes, long on photo-opportunities and light on substance, he succeeded in this election campaign to remake the image of "New" Fianna Fail in order to sell it to a younger generation without alienating the old guard.

In Northern Ireland, the Unionists have watched the "Eire" election with their customary detachment; an event in a foreign country which need not bother them. Mr Ahern lost no time in declaring that the North will be a priority. The Sinn Fein vote, which ended higher than the outgoing government's coalition partner, Democratic Left, proves that it must be so. Mr Ahern is tipped to give his predecessor Albert Reynolds a role as a special peace envoy to Northern Ireland. It was Mr Reynolds, more than anybody else, who was able to judge that the time was ripe to get tough with the IRA and demand a ceasefire. Some more of the same is what is now required.

A Fianna Fail-led Irish government peels away their last excuse. If Mr Ahern is serious about ridding Ireland of its civil-war ghosts, he must spell out to Mr Adams that this time the settlement train really is pulling out of the station.

End of the knight

IN POLITICS there is no honour, wrote Disraeli, and now under Tony Blair there are to be no political honours either. For Conservative backbenchers, this is a cruel blow, since they have come to expect a handout of titles and rewards for their years sitting on the green benches. Ever since Margaret Thatcher reintroduced such awards in 1979, not an honours list has passed that has not contained its CBEs, knighthoods and privy councillorships for the Tory faithful. Even the open disloyalties of the Major years did not stem the awards to the Conservative backbenches and the Tory party backrooms, with often as many as 40 awards in the two lists which appear every year. The contrast between the cultures of the parties has become stark. Of 164 Conservative MPs today, 20 have knighthoods, compared with one Liberal Democrat among 46 and a solitary Labour knight among 419 MPs.

Mr Blair's ban on political honours is absolutely right, as far as it goes. It may be old-fashioned to believe that parliamentary service ought to be its own reward, but this is also a principle which has come back into fashion. Public confidence in politicians slid steadily lower through the Conservative years. Rebuilding that confidence is an urgent civic task. The Thatcher-Major years established an unwritten convention that to become an MP was an almost automatic guarantee of a knighthood. That is a pernicious idea, and it had to stop. Mr Blair is right to draw a line between the old ways and the new.

Unfortunately, Mr Blair has not drawn a similarly decisive line against the equally pernicious automatic award of peerages to retired former Cabinet ministers. As with backbench knighthoods, the unwritten convention of the ministerial peerage is entirely an invention of the corrupt Thatcher years. After the last election, the queue to do so is particularly long. But this would also have been the moment to put an end to it. This should not preclude all political peerages, but it would stop the automaticity that has now grown up. The move would not make him very popular with the Tories, but nobody else need care much about that. It might not go down very well among his own colleagues either, but right now they are enjoying the truest reward of office — the power to change practices that cannot possibly be justified in a modern democracy.

Voting has meaning even in a phoney poll

Martin Woollacott

ELECTIONS cannot be simply divided into those that are truly democratic and those that are fraudulent. In the most democratic of elections there are elements of coercion and manipulation, and in the least democratic there are still politics going on.

In three recent elections in Muslim countries, in Iran, Indonesia, and Algeria, the key importance of the vote has been demonstrated in different ways. In each of them, a government has been seeking, not a mandate in the Western sense, but an affirmation it very much desires.

In Indonesia, this was that the people not disrupt a show of mature control that the regime, and its ageing head, urgently needed for both domestic and international reasons. In Iran, it was a renewal of that sector of government which acts as a safety valve for popular feelings and aspirations. In Algeria, it is the life-and-death matter of support in an exercise of re-legitimation on which the whole future of the country hangs. The relatively low turn-out in Algeria, in spite of a massive security presence that was expected to lead to a marshalling of the vote in many areas, means the government has not got the resounding answer it would have preferred.

It was not always like this. The stock phrase "the elections were a farce" recalls a time when elections were easier to run, easier to rig, and easier to ignore. Past elections in all three of these countries were travesties. Elections in Iran under the Shah were, at one stage, fought between two confected organisations that Iranians labelled the "Yes, Sir" and the "Yes, Your Majesty" parties. Algerian politics were utterly predictable until they opened up after the riots in 1988, which led to the 1992 election and its tragic outcome. Indonesian politics, revolving around a government party and manipulated second and third parties, have changed least, but they have shifted to the point where government intervention in "opposition" affairs is more overt and brutal.

Managed elections are large and critical events in national life. They are regime tests that can be more traumatic for the country than your workaday Western election, even when that produces dramas like those in Britain and France recently. Losing in this context usually means losing control. If a government's rallies are ill-attended, if it has to imprison important political leaders or fire on demonstrators, if it fails to get a good turn-out or has to go in for vote fraud on a big scale, or if it manifestly gets some results it had not wanted — all these count as failures.

In Indonesia, Suharto already had one failure when he organised the ousting of the leader of the Indonesian Democratic party, Megawati Sukarnoputri, last year. Riots during the elections suggested lack of full control, as did the use by the Muslim party of Megawati posters, even if the poll was a textbook show of voter obedience.

Megawati spoke during the election of the growing "rage of the poor", which is the most obvious factor linking elections of this kind. Authoritarian regimes are worse than democratic ones at dealing with the consequences of modernisation and population movement. The shanty towns brew a new kind of politics. In Algeria, this excluded class, without jobs or a stake in the system, turned the 1992 election into a triumph for the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), forcing a frightened government to annul the result. The violence since, drawing on the ranks of the alienated young for its "fighters", has made it worse.

In Iran, the newly urbanised were supporters of the revolution. Their children today have not voted against the revolution, but they have voted against repression and inefficiency at home and a game of enemies abroad, by casting ballots for Mohammed Khatami. Iranian unemployment may be as high as 30 per cent, even if life is not as dire as in Algeria. Khatami has attracted such votes, just as Hashemi Rafsanjani did before him, because of his hints of liberalism on lifestyle.

In the two secular regimes, much opposition takes a religious form, intensely so in Algeria. In the religious regime, the pressure for change has a quasi-secular tinge. But the social forces on which opposition draws are the same — an educated middle class attuned to Western ideas and standards, and the city masses.

In both Indonesia and Iran, the government has demonstrated control, always so pleasing to an authoritarian regime, but it has not got the full affirmation it wanted. In Indonesia, it had to handicap the opposition blatantly, by excluding the most popular leader, and it got riots as a result. In Iran, the conservative establishment around Ali Khamenei, the country's spiritual leader, saw its preferred candidate trounced.

IN ALGERIA'S bitter situation, the government is not so much the ringmaster as a compromised actor in the conflict. Its methods against its enemies may not be much better, or no better, than theirs. What it is doing is not so much trying to demonstrate that it can and will control political life, as asking for a chance to do so. This result will be disappointing, and may mean that negotiations with the FIS, probably also favoured by the new French government, will come sooner or later.

Laurent Kabila refused to hold immediate elections in former Zaire, and will only have them in April 1999, by which time he expects to be in a position to ensure victory. By then, presumably, he hopes to have in place an obedient administration and army, and a network of appropriate alliances. One can see his point. The Congo is not ready for an election now, and it is ready for effective government, which would certainly be widely endorsed in two years' time if genuinely established.

Meanwhile there are almost completely meaningless exercises in sham democracy, such as the one that may be coming up in Nigeria. In other cases, there are real politics, if distorted, and a real exchange, if limited, between government and people. Managed democracies do not always manage themselves into crisis. And yet the history of managed democracy seems to show that it is much harder to do than the other kind.

Jospin's victory fuels great expectations

COMMENT
Jean-Marie Colombani

WHEN President Jacques Chirac announced the dissolution of parliament and elections, he was not expecting a new regime to emerge. Quite the contrary. But with the votes cast on June 1 the public set down the outlines of a new republic, by proposing a new balance of power and calling for a fresh way of conducting politics.

The demand for change was obvious. Political France was practically the exclusive property of the right — the Assembly, the Senate, most of the regions and *départements* — and the electorate rejected the prospect of being locked for five more years into a system already so tightly controlled.

The defeat is above all Chirac's, who asked the people to give him a free hand so that he could perpetuate the political culture of a party-state, in this case, his own Rassemblement Pour la République (RPR).

Chirac tried to restore the absolute presidency at a time when all the signs indicated that the French preferred a limited presidency. In his view, as he kept pointing out during his own election campaign, France was and would continue to be bound by the legacy of 1958 (the year the Fifth Republic was established). That is, at a moment in history that was ripe for a thorough overhaul. But not everybody can be a Gaullist. As it turned out, even the neo-Gaullist leaders have been incapable of practising Gaullism. The irony is that it has fallen to Gaullism's heirs to wind up the Gaullist interlude and open the way, through defeat, to a vision of the right inspired by the enlightened conservatism prevailing in, for example, Germany.

Lionel Jospin is seen as a straightforward man who has forged a rainbow alliance, which could help to give a more positive perception of public action. As France embarks on this power-sharing, one hopes the Socialist leader will work hard to honour his commitments. He may even be successful, which would be a genuine and salutary revolution in French public life.

Jospin will have to consider whether the time has come for a more modest approach to politics: the society that refused to give *carte blanche* to the right has also refused it to the left. Now that the electorate has had its say, it will probably want to make its voice heard again on countless occasions that will force the new government to engage in a genuine social dialogue.

On condition that society stops expecting the government to do everything, and the government in return gets down to its fundamental tasks of reforming itself, narrowing the social rift and, as the French economy begins to pick up, tackling unemployment, which is at an unprecedented level.

There are three priorities: the people must not be let down; what Jospin has termed the "republican moral virtue" must be restored; and the European ideal has to be revived.

Not letting the people down means providing social democracy in place of out-and-out liberalism in an economy that has become globalised. How can the welfare state be adapted when the state itself suffers from a cruel lack of resources?

The main challenge facing Jospin's Socialist party is that it won the elections by rehabilitating the idea of a "reformist" party at a time in history that is not reformist. Will he be able to count on Europe's political climate becoming more favourable after the British Labour party's victory, and be able to resist the tyranny of markets?

The new government needs time to take stock: the left has come to power at a difficult time. Growth is hesitant, tax revenue is far lower than forecast, and the level of contributions raises fears of worsening welfare deficits.

The road is clear for institutions to be reformed. People's expectations are likely to be met by the programme recently proposed by five constitutional experts: revising the constitution so as to cut the presidential term from seven to five years, bringing back the referendum, banning elected representatives from holding two posts at the same time, completing the process of decentralising government, and rendering the government impartial.

Rekindling the European ideal is vital. With Tony Blair's victory in Britain, that of the left in France could herald a new era of European construction. Aware of the stakes involved in the globalisation of trade, Europeans appear to want a continent that is democratic, with a growing economy that provides jobs.

With the power of the United States, Asia getting into its stride and markets all hoping to stop the movement towards the single currency, Jospin with his Socialist friends in the other European countries — nine of the EU's 15 member states are run by social democrats — will have to confirm the EU's determination to make the euro a reality on the due date.

A clear choice has been made. The new majority is strong, but its electoral base is limited. This requires Jospin to unite the winning coalition and keep dialogue with the people open. However, there is still doubt about institutions. In 1992, the constitutional expert Georges Vedel noted that if there was one set of circumstances that would prompt France to consider a new regime, a plausible scenario could be made out from a weak president losing control of his own majority and abandoning his supporters. "Then it would be time to ask oneself whether the Fifth Republic had had its day," he said.

That scenario sums up the only doubt which, after having long hovered around Chirac when he was a presidential candidate, now affects his presidency and, through him, his office. The next five years will tell whether or not it was a Gaullist who destroyed the Fifth Republic's institutions by mistake.

(June 3)

Ex-Civil Guard chief on bribery charges

Marie-Claude Decamps in Madrid

THE FORMER director general of the Civil Guard (Spain's paramilitary national police force), Luis Roldán Ibañez, who had police forces worldwide looking for him for the past 10 months, is at last facing his judges. He went on the run two years ago to escape arrest.

The courthouse in Madrid where his hearing has begun appears to be too small to accommodate such a mass of witnesses. Among the hundred or so who will be called during a trial expected to last five months are two former Socialist interior ministers — José Luis Corcuera and Antonio Asunción — as well as the current defence minister, Eduardo Serra, who was the adviser of a building firm that paid commissions to Roldán. Accused with their ex-boss are eight other Civil Guards, including a general, Roldán's wife Blanca Rodriguez, and a former mistress. The trial marks the beginning of a series of court cases involving several former senior Socialist government officials.

The Roldán scandal, with its twists and turns, shadowy episodes and accusations, chronicles one of the most embarrassing periods of Felipe González's government. The saga has been dubbed The Song Of Roldán — after the 12th century French epic poem Chanson de Roland, where the hero is pitted against overwhelming Saracen forces — by journalists who, like the daily Diario 16's tenacious team, did much to bring the scandal to light in 1993. The central figure of this new version of the song also appears to be headed for a sad end. The former Civil Guard boss is facing a possible 32-year prison term and fines of up to 3.5 billion pesetas ($24 million).

The charges include forgery, taking bribes, influence peddling, embezzling public funds and fraudulent enrichment. With the Socialist party's help, this former minor employee of a Saragossa building firm became the government's representative in Navarre, then in 1986 director general of one of Spain's national institutions, the Civil Guard.

It appears that Roldán began cheating early in his career, with the bogus engineering and economics diplomas he claimed to have. He liked to say: "One can't command without being a bit of a *cabrón* [bastard]," a style he rigorously adopted. Along with a few other senior officials, he took a personal interest in the Civil Guard's "secret funds", which were used to pay bonuses and fringe benefits.

It takes organisation and imagination to satisfy the yen for a good life when one's monthly salary is only $6,000. Roldán had both. He allegedly raked off 8 per cent on all Civil Guard contracts (construction of barracks, provision of supplies, uniforms, etc), and apparently even succeeded in talking local companies threatened by Basque ETA separatists into paying him for protection he never gave.

All this is alleged to have helped Roldán amass a fortune of almost $18 million, acquire 12 homes and five luxury cars. He also opened bank accounts in Switzerland — no fewer than 40, it is said.

Roldán keeps saying he has received death threats and doubts the court's impartiality, but has so far refused to reveal how he made his fortune. He blames former Socialist officials for the graft. It was on their orders, he claims, that he opened bank accounts in Switzerland, first to deposit funds for the struggle against ETA terrorism, and later to finance the Socialist party.

(June 5)

Sweden rules out the euro

Benoît Peltier in Stockholm

SWEDEN has decided not to enter the European Monetary Union (EMU), at least not in the first wave in January 1999. After consulting his party colleagues, the Social Democrat prime minister, Göran Persson, explained that the European project in its present "uncertain and faltering" state commands only "weak public support". But Sweden is keeping open the option of joining the EMU at a later date, possibly before 2002.

The decision comes as no surprise, and confirms Sweden's reputation as one of the European Union's most reluctant members only two and a half years after joining it. Asked to give the conditions necessary for his country to accept the euro at a later date, Persson spoke of the need for the EU to adopt more social policies, something cherished by the Scandinavians. "If governments began co-operating to reduce unemployment, then public opinion in Sweden will swing round and notice that it is a better project," he said.

Until such time, he believes that the present situation in the 15 EU member states — particularly in France, Germany and Italy where many of the EMU project's basic components are being questioned — prompts a cautious attitude.

As the man who introduced an austerity plan to put Sweden's finances on a more sound basis and also meet the Maastricht treaty's convergence criteria, Persson is thought to be personally convinced of the EMU's advantages. But domestic policy has its own priorities: the Social Democratic party, which he has led since March 1996, is deeply divided on the single currency. Fearful that his party might implode, the prime minister tried to stall for time last year by calling for an "in-depth debate" on the soundness of switching to the euro.

While there was debate, it was largely hogged by the single currency's opponents, as those favouring the euro hardly raised their voices (a recent poll showed that only 26 per cent of Swedes favour entering the EMU in 1999).

Last autumn, a committee of experts recommended refraining from joining the EMU in the first wave, even if it means entering it later. The recommendation was accepted by Persson, who went against his instincts and decided not to put the issue to a vote in the parliament at the end of this year.

More surprising is his talk of taking the issue to the country — either in an election or a referendum — before any possible acceptance of the euro after 1999. Until now, the prime minister had ruled out such a possibility, and many see this about-turn as a concession to the staunchly anti-EMU Centre party (ex-Agrarian), which the Social Democrats need to stay in power.

(June 5)

A graceful leap into the modern age

Philippe Dagen reviews a striking show of Fernand Léger's work in Paris

SUPPOSE, for a moment, that you are at the current Léger exhibition in the Centre Georges-Pompidou, standing in front of Le Marinier (The Bargeman), an almost square picture measuring 50 x 50cm. The lighting is good and quite intense, as Léger's painting requires.

You are scrutinising the picture: black, white and yellow planes occupy the edges; there are some capital letters that could be the first letters of a word: in the middle there are conical volumes, discs that seem to be turning on their axis, and long narrow cylinders: colours shading off from scarlet to white, or from violet to white, suggest their roundness and the revolving motion of the discs.

Between and behind these volumes there are other, smaller planes, some marked with regularly spaced black dots. Strong chromatic highlights, punctuated by repeated black patches, are distributed over the whole surface of the painting.

After looking at the picture for a time, you may find yourself interpreting the arrangement of violet and white cones as a likeness of the eponymous bargeman, his face consisting of a flat oval shape divided into two halves, one white, the other black. But that identification is no more important than that of the letters, which may refer to boat registration codes.

The question you ask yourself is: how was such a painting possible? How did Léger manage to conjure up such finely tuned forms, such harmonies, such resonance?

Le Marinier dates from 1918. No doubt one could, and one should, look at how Léger treated the relationship between colour and volume up to that date. If one did so, one's amazement at this painting would no doubt be somewhat tempered, but it would not disappear altogether.

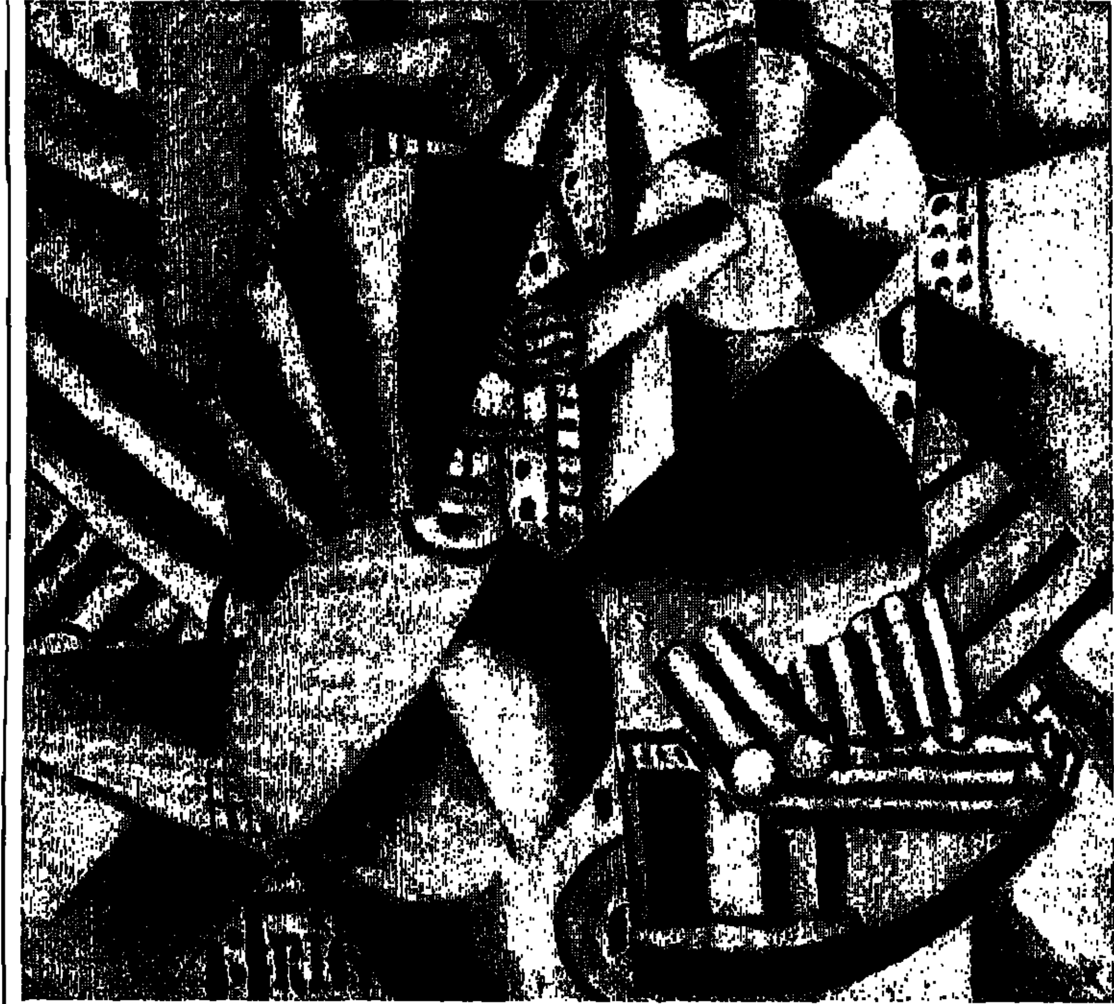
At some point, as he worked in his studio, the 37-year-old painter who had just come back from the war hit upon this new way of constructing and colouring a painting, of introducing figurative allusions while keeping them imprecise, of creating a sophisticated interplay between reality and the powers of painting.

There was at that time no precedent for what he achieved, not even in Robert Delaunay or Pablo Picasso. It was a remarkable leap into the unknown, an act of audacity, a moment of grace.

The Léger exhibition is full of such moments of grace. Indeed, it is almost as if it had deliberately aimed to focus solely on them: it includes only a little more than 200 paintings and drawings out of his very prolific *oeuvre*, as well as a few set design projects and monumental works.

There are hardly any major paintings missing from this anthological selection, except for La Femme Et L'Enfant (1922), which the Basel museum declined to lend. The fairly spacious hanging of the pictures emphasises the majestic effect and serene beauty of the ensemble while at the same time respecting a chronological order.

Conversely, because of the whittling-down selection process, the exhibition also points up Léger's abrupt changes of course and unpredictable fresh starts — a whole dynamic that meant he was never satisfied for very long with what he had just invented.



Le Marinier, one of a series of works on this theme that Fernand Léger painted around 1918

In 1909 Léger was a Cubist in the Paul Cézanne tradition. That was no longer the case by 1912, because the fragmentation of bodies and objects according to a system of planes and edges, as practised by Picasso and Georges Braque, encouraged them to do without colour and paint only in grey, ochre and white.

Léger felt that these paintings had been made with "spiders' webs", and that he needed to reintroduce colour even if it meant breaking away from analytical Cubism — which he promptly did.

He then had to decide how he was going to paint: there followed his second experimental phase and first invention. Shapes were represented by the drawing, which traced the main lines of the cylinders and cones, and by colour — an alternation of red-and-white or blue-and-white strips revolving around the volumes.

Those shapes clustered together to form either a mechanical construct, as in Contraste de Formes, or an allusive figure, called Femme Couchée or L'Escalier, several versions of which dating from 1913-14 are included in the exhibition. They are all almost equally successful. By opening with these works, the retrospective gives Léger the exalted position he deserves in the history of 20th century painting.

His second revolution began in 1917 with Les Joueurs de Cartes and continued with Le Marinier. It was a period during which he produced his finest series of abstract-cum-figurative variations on modern themes like the tug, propellers, the circus and the typographer.

It culminated in 1919 with La Ville, a large composition which definitively refutes the fallacy that the abstract and the figurative are incompatible by demonstrating that, when combined, they have great poetic power and are a profound expression of their period.

Léger felt an urgent need to introduce contemporary objects and the bustle of modern life into the ancient art of painting. He did not mind drawing up inventories. Everything is there: gears, cogged wheels, girders, pedals, spotlights, cap-wearing workers, metal architecture, film stars, everyday still-lifes, and interiors with diamond-patterned wallpaper and chequered carpets.

Geometry governed his painting because it governed fashion, furniture and buildings. Colours were bright because they were the colours of dresses, posters, dance halls and cars.

IN ABOUT 1921, Léger managed to assimilate the diversity of the modern world he saw around him and suggest it in his paintings without making it seem either dull or cosy. He was quite prepared to include incongruities, which prevented him from seeming to repeat his idiom too systematically. Le Siphon (1924) uses a literal image from advertising, while Elément Mécanique, painted the same year, pushes transposition so far towards an equilibrium of diagonals and rectangles that all figurative references disappear.

Léger was faced with a choice between siding either with those who believed in a return to representation or with the champions of out-and-out Abstraction and Neo-Plasticism. Such alternatives were of no interest whatsoever to him. He did not choose; he simply added and synthesised. Only Picasso, whose dislike of Léger was heartily reciprocated, and, later on, Jean Hélion, who was his friend, took a comparable risk.

It would have been easy for Léger simply to turn out Légers. Once he had become famous he could have gone on happily churning out more and more mechanistic and scrupulously compartmentalised compositions.

But around 1930 he upset the well-ordered environment that was establishing itself around him. He injected violent doses of reality, based on drawings from life, into his paintings. That did not mean he had decided to rally to the cause of realism. It was simply that his studies of holly leaves, flints, tree stumps, old gloves and locks cranked his painting and thinking machine back into action.

Looking at something from very close to, or enlarging it, as photography or the cinema could do, was the same as discovering "a new reality", he said in 1934. "Naturally, art has been quick to seize upon this new objectivity," he went on. "And that can be disconcerting because of the effects obtained, which are so contrary to and different from others. The connections between the true and the beautiful are constant and closely linked."

Those remarks are relevant to the last 15 years of Léger's life (1940-55), during which he went into exile in the United States and, after the war, returned to France.

An alarming preoccupation with beauty can occasionally be detected in these paintings. They are often dismissed as facile, over-decorative and repetitive. Such criticism is not entirely unfounded. Léger had a tendency, which became increasingly marked as time went on, to strive for rich and stable harmonies and to produce perfect pictures that teetered on the brink of inertia.

But such carping is belied by the Plongeurs series and Les Trois Musiciens of 1944. They show that even late in his career Léger did not eschew incongruous or inventive devices that might have seemed out of place. He stuck up for his freedom right to the end.

Fernand Léger, Centre Georges-Pompidou, Paris. Closed Tuesday. Until September 29

(May 30)

Moving eye for images

Philippe Dagen

AT THE end of the summer of 1919, Fernand Léger and Léonce Rosenberg, then his dealer, exchanged long letters. Rosenberg was on holiday with his family in Evian. He passed the time jotting down thoughts about the difference between the Mediterranean and the Nordic souls. He saw himself as a Mediterranean and reproached Léger for having a basically Nordic soul, which he believed to be tainted by barbarity.

Léger could not see the point of philosophical systems set in stone. The only things that interested him were history and the horrific present bequeathed by history. For him, the war had not just marked a break and revealed the unspeakable. He recognised in it the apotheosis of industrial, inhuman modernity. He realised that no art, not even painting, could survive if it refused to draw conclusions from that ordeal.

Few artists or writers were as aware as Léger of the extent to which they were entering a different kind of civilisation, where painting and certain types of writing would cease to be effective or relevant. As he walked across a battlefield at Verdun after an engagement in 1916, Léger looked at the corpses and their blown-off hands. They ought to be photographed, he wrote.

When on leave in Paris that same year, he dragged Guillaume Apollinaire to the cinema and revealed Chaplin to him. In 1919, he worked with Blaise Cendrars on a book, La Fin du Monde Filmé par l'Ange Notre-Dame, in which he tried to reproduce the dynamism of film editing. He illustrated Yvan Goll's Chapliniade.

In 1921 he watched Abel Gance shoot La Roue. In 1923 he designed the sets of Marcel L'Herbier's L'Inhumaine. He revealed later that he had been so taken up with the cinema he almost gave up painting.

In 1924 he took the plunge and shot Ballet Mécanique. The film is a succession of crisply edited and sometimes superimposed images of moving mechanical parts, objects and fragments of faces.

Léger films in close-up, just as he draws. He composes by juxtaposition, just as he paints. He does not so much describe as show, forcing the eye to look. "With the help of the cine-camera, I moved objects that never move and I saw they took on an objective meaning; but it was a mobile objectivity, unlike the immobile objectivity of painting, which imposes itself through contrast."

It would be simplistic to see Léger purely as a painter of modern life and to assume that painting was the only activity he himself thought worthwhile and the canvas the only image that interested him. "I made films to show objects in their raw state," he said. Reflections of that kind and his Ballet Mécanique make Léger a painter who stood very much apart from his contemporaries.

(May 30)

Le Monde
Directeur: Jean-Marie Colombani

Official Party Wins In Algeria Elections

John Lancaster in Algiers

ALGERIA'S main pro-government party scored a comfortable if not entirely convincing victory last week in the first parliamentary elections here since the eruption of civil war between Islamic militants and government forces in 1992.

Opposition parties promptly accused the government of fraud, and power will remain firmly in the hands of President Liamine Zeroual, a member of the ruling military elite that has dominated Algeria since its independence from France in 1962. But a respectable showing by two pro-Islamic opposition parties raised modest hopes among some Algerians of a gradual transition toward pluralism and, possibly, an end to the slaughter that has claimed an estimated 60,000 lives.

"If the elections give confidence to people that things are moving in the right direction, I think the violence could decrease in a fairly short time," Mohammed Hanned, a political scientist at the University of Algiers, said in an interview. "It's the beginning of a process."

The National Democratic Rally, which represents Zeroual's military-backed government, won 155 of 380 seats in the new National Assembly, according to final results announced at a news conference on Friday morning last week by Interior Minister Mustapha Benmansour. Another pro-government party, the National Liberation Front, won 64 seats, bringing the total number of pro-government seats in parliament to 219, or 57 percent.

But in second place was the country's biggest legal Islamic party, the Movement for a Peaceful Society, with 69 seats. A smaller Islamic party, Al Nahda, won 34 seats, giving the legal Islamic political groups an overall presence of 103 seats, or 25 percent. The opposition Socialist Forces Front came in fifth with 19 seats.

Officials hailed the relatively peaceful contest as evidence that Algerians were shunning the violence that erupted after the army canceled multi-party elections in January 1992 rather than permit a victory by the Islamic Salvation Front, which has since been banned. They declared a final turnout of 66 percent, or slightly more than 10 million of the 16.8 million eligible voters.

"This historic vote, which was not marred by any distortion, is an enormous progress and a great victory dedicated to the nation and future generations to build and strengthen democracy and the state of law," Benmansour told reporters.

Opposition parties, though, accused the government of stuffing ballot boxes, orchestrating pro-government votes in military barracks and physically threatening party election observers or barring them from polling places and vote-counting centers. They also suggested that the government had inflated turnout figures to boost the credibility of the contest.

"Obviously there were some excesses committed against the constitution, the legislation and the rights of the people," Sheik Mahfoud Nahna, head of the Movement for a Peaceful Society, said at a news conference. "The official results don't reflect the expectations of the people nor achieve the changes hoped by the people."

Under auspices of the United Nations, more than 100 international monitors were in Algeria to observe the elections, although their ability to do so effectively was questionable given the large security details that followed them everywhere they went.

But many of the reports of fraud appear to be credible, according to a member of the international team who spoke on condition of anonymity. In one instance at a polling station near Algiers, observers grew suspicious when ballot boxes delivered from an army barracks were found to contain only votes for the National Democratic Rally, the source said.

But opposition leaders said they would direct their complaints to a government election commission rather than urging their followers to take to the streets. Nahna, for example, prefaced his accusations of fraud by pronouncing the election "a democratic big day" and a "great day," smiling broadly all the while. "We are open to solutions," he said.

Supporters in Algiers of President Liamine Zeroual celebrate their recently formed National Democratic Rally party's general election victory

Kabila Troops 'Killed Hundreds of Hutus'

John Pomfret in Goma, Congo

TROOPS loyal to newly installed President Laurent Kabila have killed hundreds of people and torched scores of houses in attacks on villages inhabited mainly by Hutus in the eastern Congo, according to witnesses, aid workers and Congolese human-rights activists.

The allegations — borne out by local inhabitants' descriptions of recent attacks and the presence of mass graves and charred houses — add a new dimension to charges that Kabila's troops have committed atrocities during their seven-month sweep to power that toppled the country's longtime dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko.

For months, Western aid officials have accused Kabila's forces of slaughtering Rwandan Hutu refugees who had been sheltered since 1994 in Zaire — as this country was known during Mobutu's rule — and who fled the advance of Kabila's rebel forces after their rebellion erupted in October. But now aid officials and others in the region say evidence is mounting that Kabila's troops are also killing native Congolese — mostly Hutus, but others as well.

The reported killings constitute a new phase in the generations-old blood feud among Hutus, Tutsi and other tribes that populate east-central Africa, particularly the areas that are now the countries of Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and Congo. Animosities between the more numerous Hutus and the traditionally dominant Tutsis — along with complex social and political relations between the two tribes that date back to colonial times — have fueled sporadic ethnic massacres that have claimed hundreds of thousands of lives since the late 1950s.

Most recently, a Hutu-extremist government in Rwanda orchestrated the slaughter of more than 500,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus before a Tutsi military force halted the killings, seized power and drove more than a million Hutus into exile in Zaire.

That same Tutsi-dominated Rwandan government, in concert with Uganda, Tutsi-led Burundi and Angola, backed Kabila's rebel movement, which began with an uprising by Congolese Tutsis last year. The foreign backing, and the presence of Tutsis in Kabila's military and political leadership, have spurred persistent allegations that Kabila's men and their patrons have a secret agenda: to purge eastern Congo of Hutus and other ethnic groups that have clashed with Tutsis in the past.

Such allegations are a political time bomb for Kabila's government, which seized power in Kinshasa amid much hope that decades of Mobutu's roguish "kleptocracy" would be replaced by something better.

Now, faced with widespread human-rights abuses and strong evidence of atrocities, many Congolese people and Western officials say Kabila's movement has lost the gloss it won during the seven months it spent conquering this massive country of 46 million people, which covers an area the size of of the United States east of the Mississippi. Numerous Congolese now speak of Kabila's army as an occupying force of foreigners, led by Tutsis from Rwanda.

The United States, which was one of Mobutu's strongest backers during the Cold War but later distanced itself from him and remained on the sidelines during Kabila's drive to power, has called for investigation of human-rights abuses, as has the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights.

A team of U.N. human-rights investigators was barred from entering the country last month to inspect mass graves in the east. And Western aid agencies are still denied access to large swaths of Congo's forbidding forest where they fear as many as 240,000 Hutu men, women and children could have been trapped by Kabila's forces.

"We are extremely concerned for the physical safety of these refugees and the local population," said Peter Kessler, a spokesman for the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees.

It is unclear exactly who is ordering the killings and how widespread they are. Some say the command comes from the highest levels of Kabila's organization, which has relied heavily on Rwandan security assistance throughout the brief war. The goal, they say, is to create a Hutu-free buffer zone to protect Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi. The Hutu refugees, who poured out of Rwanda and Burundi in July 1994, include Hutu gunmen who slaughtered 500,000 Tutsi in Rwanda that year.

Panel Backs Cloning Ban

Rick Weiss

A FEDERAL bioethics commission has formally recommended that Congress enact a law prohibiting the creation of human beings by cloning, saying the technique posed too many medical risks and raised unresolved ethical concerns.

Until Congress passes such a law, the commission said, the federal government should continue its moratorium on the use of federal funds for human cloning experiments, and privately funded researchers should be strongly encouraged to abide by the same rules.

"The Commission concludes that at this time it is morally unacceptable for anyone in the public or private sector, whether in a research or a clinical setting, to attempt to create a child using ... cloning," the National Bioethics Advisory Commission said in its final report to President Clinton, approved last weekend at a meeting in Arlington, Virginia, a Washington suburb.

The commission stopped short of recommending a legislative ban on the creation of cloned human embryos for research purposes — a practice already prohibited among federally financed researchers but largely unregulated in the private sector. But it warned in strong language against any attempt to implant such cloned human embryos into women's wombs, where they might grow into babies.

"Professional and scientific societies should make clear," the commission said, "that any attempt to create a child by [cloning] and implantation into a woman's body would at this time be an irresponsible, unethical, and unprofessional act."

Clinton banned the use of federal funds for human cloning research — and asked private laboratories and fertility clinics to follow the same rules voluntarily — after researchers in Scotland announced in February that they had cloned a sheep named Dolly from a single cell taken from an adult sheep. He then asked the recently created bioethics commission to study the issue of human cloning and make recommendations within 90 days.

Members said the commission decided to recommend a legal ban on cloning people, rather than an extended moratorium, because of doubts that private fertility clinics would abide by a voluntary ban.

"It is our concern that these clinics have operated in a way that really pushes the envelope of what is acceptable," said commission member Alexander Capron, a professor of law and medicine at the University of Southern California. "The main worry is that individual fertility clinics or the like would be induced by their own desire to be the first" to clone people.

The 18-member ethics commission, composed of experts in science, law and ethics, also recommended that any law include a "sunset clause," to ensure that the ban gets reconsidered within three to five years.

Israeli Labor Party Picks Ex-General

Barton Gellman in Jerusalem

A YEAR after Israeli voters drove it from power, the Labor Party bid anew for the premiership last week by anointing Ehud Barak, a tough-minded general, as its standard bearer.

Barak, 55, a commando who rose to armed-services chief, won the job of leading his battered party to elections by 2000. On his way to victory he nudged aside former Prime Minister Shimon Peres, who had sought to delay the succession and to retain a modicum of power with a newly created post of party president.

After dominating in final-day opinion polls, Barak beat his nearest rival, Yossi Beilin, by polling 51 percent. Shlomo Ben Ami and Ephraim Sneh trailed far behind.

Styling himself after Yitzhak Rabin, the slain Labor prime minister who also came to public life from the nation's senior military post, Barak centered his campaign on the argument that no one else could bring Labor back from exile. "Only with Barak will we win," a rhyming slogan in Hebrew, appeared on every Barak poster and on tens of thousands of bumper stickers and buttons.

There was more than a passing resemblance in that to the campaign of "electability" that brought Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to the Likud Party chairmanship four years ago. Both men assumed their positions as outsiders, succeeding much older leaders — Peres is 73, and Likud's Yitzhak Shamir was then 76 — who had just been turned out of office in general elections.

Barak's ideological critics on the left, coining a term of derogation from Netanyahu's nickname, describe Barak as "Bibi-compatible" in other respects. As a freshman member of parliament Barak voted against Rabin's last major agreement with the Palestinians, in September 1995, and he expressed solidarity with criticism by Likud hawk Ariel Sharon of January's agreement on an Israeli troop pullback from Hebron.

For most party members, that was not the point. Under Israel's new system of direct election, Labor needs a candidate who can go head to head with Netanyahu and withstand the Likud leader's stinging accusations of softness on terror.


Ehud Barak greets supporters in Jerusalem PHOTO: DAOUD MIZRAHI

Netanyahu skillfully harnessed voters' fears that Peres lacked the strength to defend Israel's interests against Arab enemies while pursuing peace. Peres, who never served in uniform, suffered in this argument by the aura of expertise Netanyahu brought as a former soldier in the Sayeret Matkal, Israel's elite anti-terror army unit.

Barak was Netanyahu's commander in the Sayeret Matkal. In a country that still values security credentials above all, Barak can growl back, as Rabin once did, at the presumed expertise of "reserve captain Benjamin Netanyahu."

S. Koreans Protest at Corruption

Mary Jordan in Seoul

CONSTRUCTION worker Kim Nam Shik decided that if South Korea's corrupt politicians wanted money so badly, he would give it to them. So he threw a month's salary — $4,100 — out of a hotel window earlier this month and watched the blizzard of bills flutter to the ground in front of City Hall.

As police led Kim away and traffic stopped while hundreds of people scrambled for the cash, the fed-up taxpayer said politicians promise good things in campaigns, but once in office they turn into "liars and thieves."

"People feel betrayed," Kim said in an interview. "It's sad. People like me have to work hard to make ends meet. Politicians already have power and fame, but it's not enough; they want money, too."

Kim's act of angry defiance — he also threw anti-government fliers out the window — illustrates a new high-water mark in South Koreans' disgust with the corruption that has tainted business and politics here for decades.

Two former presidents were sentenced last year to long prison terms for bribery scandals involving more than $600 million. Just when it seemed things couldn't get any uglier, President Kim Young Sam's son, Kim Hyun Chul, was arrested and several of his closest aides were sentenced to jail.

The clouds of corruption are swirling ominously close to a president who came into office as an avowed corruption-buster.

Since a nationally televised speech, when Kim Young Sam conceded that the money-soaked political system forced him to spend huge sums in his 1992 campaign, thousands of students, carrying firebombs and iron bars, have been rioting. All last week, the capital has teemed with riot police.

In a city where noisy student protest is a way of life, the current demonstrations have surprised people with their violence and intensity.

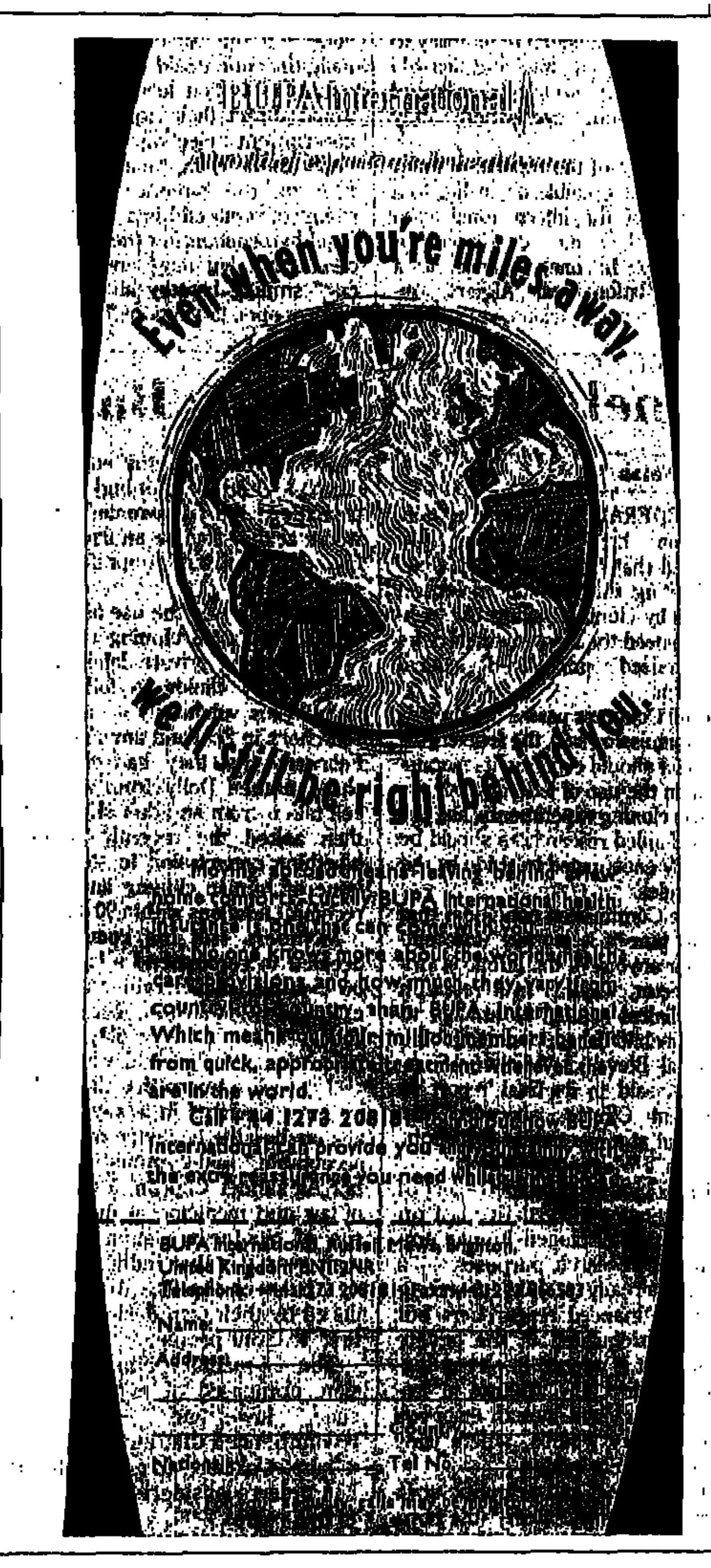
So far, Kim Young Sam has declined to fully engage in the debate over his campaign financing. He refuses to say how much he spent in 1992 or exactly where it came from. Critics say he may have spent $400 million — 10 times the legal limit.

The president has not been charged with doing anything wrong. In fact, many people say he has done his best to change a system that works only when greased with graft. They credit him with important banking law reforms that make it harder to hide dirty money.

Still, the current scandals have severely hobbled him in the last year of his presidency. His plummeting approval ratings have left South Korea without a strong leader at a crucial time in dealings with North Korea, and at a time when the United States is pressing a vigorous trade agenda.

Kim is prohibited by law from seeking a second five-year term in December's presidential election. A group of hopefuls, called the "nine dragons," are jockeying for the nomination of Kim's ruling New Korea Party.

Analysts say the scandals may reduce the contest to one basic issue: who can best lead the party away from the specter of sleaze.



Learning the Lessons From Canada's Fracture

OPINION
Charles Krauthammer

A FEW years ago, The New Republic held a competition for the most boring headline in history. The name of the contest — the benchmark for dull — was: "Worthwhile Canadian Initiative."

The key adjective was "Canadian": boring, bland, safe. I regret to report that this is no longer true. No country in the process of imploding has the right to be called boring. True, the excruciatingly slow and almost civilized way it is doing so is characteristically Canadian. But the reasons it is falling apart should be of great interest, especially to Americans.

Last week, Canada held a national election. The results show a country in an advanced stage of fracture.

Canada used to have three major parties. They represented different ideologies: There was a party of the left (the New Democratic Party), the center (the Liberals) and the right (the Progressive Conservatives).

No longer. The NDP and the PC were effectively wiped out in the 1993 parliamentary elections and have only made feeble comebacks. What is left?

There are still three major parties. But they are regional and ethnic. The Liberal Party has survived and, with a bare majority in the new Parliament, remains the ruling party. But it did so by winning two-thirds of all its seats in one province, Ontario. (Canada has ten.) In Ontario, the Liberals won 101 of 103 seats.

Ontario is the geographic and economic center of Canada. To one side is Quebec; to the other, the West. In Quebec, the majority of seats in Parliament was won by a radically ethnic and separatist party, the Bloc Quebecois. Its platform is the separation of Quebec from Canada. It sends its delegation to the national parliament in Ottawa for the principal purpose of breaking up the country.

To the other side of Ontario are the Western (prairie) provinces stretching all the way to the Pacific. The Reform Party, the second largest party in the Parliament and now the official opposition, swept 70 percent of the seats in the West. It won not a single seat anywhere else in Canada.

The Reform Party does talk about lower taxes and less government, standard conservative fare. But its real attraction is that it is anti-Quebec. The establishment, it charges, has been trying to keep Canada together with too many concessions to Quebec. The soft Easterners would give Quebec the status of a "Distinct Society" within Canada and extraordinary control over its language, culture, immigration and other functions. Reform rejects special status. Its platform is equality for all the provinces — read: Get Quebec off its pedestal — and if Quebec doesn't like it, it can go jump in the Atlantic.

Last week, the Liberals won. Ontario — bland, reasonable, accommodating — rules. For now. But the Reform Party will rail and Quebec will soon have another one of its independence referenda. The separatists have lost twice. But they lost the last one by less than 1 percent. And they vow to keep holding them until they win, at which point Canada will indeed collapse. The next referendum is probably less than two years away.

Why is this important to Americans? We know what can happen when parties and politics become radically regionalized, as in, oh, the election of 1860. Now along comes Canada to remind us again what politically inspired, politically encouraged, politically hyped ethnic and regional differences can lead to: They can threaten the very existence of a country as well-ordered and civil as Canada.

Banditry Threatens To Subvert State

David Hoffman in Moscow

VASILY NAUMOV, head of a notorious Moscow gang, stopped his BMW 525 sedan with tinted windows near the Moscow police headquarters in the early evening of January 23. Two bodyguards waited in a small Russian Zhiguli car just behind him.

Naumov answered his mobile phone. Suddenly, another car pulled up alongside him, an automatic rifle pumped 18 bullets through the side window and Naumov died behind the wheel, within yards of the police building.

The brazen killing underscored the seeming helplessness of the poorly paid, outnumbered Russian police. But Naumov's slaying was followed by an even more startling disclosure. According to police investigators, the bodyguards who were supposed to be protecting the gangster were themselves policemen, members of an elite paramilitary unit known as Saturn. They were special troops trained for suppressing prison riots, and they were guarding Naumov under a contract signed by their bosses for extra cash.

The episode is just one small glimpse of a deepening and corrosive threat to Russia's young democracy and free-market economy: the breakdown of law enforcement and the proliferation of private armies and protection rackets prone to ruthless gangland tactics.

"In Russia, everyone acknowledges there are four powers — the executive, legislative, judicial and the mass media. But they don't speak of the fifth power," said Sergei Goncharov, head of a group of former elite KGB troops that now protects Russian businesses. "The fifth power is the power of bandits. And I would never put the power of the bandits in fifth place. In Russia, it seems the power of bandits is somewhere close to first, second and third."

The tide of thuggery stems from a larger failure to establish the rule of law in Russia's great leap from totalitarianism to democracy and capitalism. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 put immense riches up for grabs — vast deposits of natural resources, sprawling factories and lucrative businesses, ranging from airlines to television networks that the state had owned for decades.

But the massive transfer of property to private hands, a necessary step to create a free-market economy, has turned into a vicious struggle for wealth in which the rule of law has never been established. Former Soviet bureaucrats, factory directors, aggressive businessmen and criminal organizations have all made a grab for the bounty through insider deals, bribery and simple brute force.

Russia's economy has taken on an oligarchic structure, in which large business conglomerates, often allied with groups of powerful politicians, compete for grand fortunes — and sometimes resort to violence.

Many leading Russian business tycoons say they want to put behind them this period of lawlessness, especially as they reach out to Western investors and foreign stock markets. They insist they are striving against huge odds to be real entrepreneurs and legitimate industrialists.

Yet, faced with Russia's current chaos, they are taking matters into their own hands. They are building their own private armies of security agents, bodyguards and commercial spies. They have often simply bought the people and weapons of the old Soviet police state — or even those of the current Russian police, as did Naumov, the slain gangster.

"There's a frightening war taking place," said Alexander Minkin, a muckraking journalist for the weekly newspaper Novaya Gazeta. "The private power structures have privatized everything. They've taken our industry, our land, and they've taken our security for themselves.

Goncharov, a 15-year-veteran of the KGB's once secret Alpha unit, said Russian businessmen have little choice but to recruit their own private security forces. "They do not trust the state," he said. "If they relied on the state, then you wouldn't see them riding around Moscow in a convoy. I laugh when I see five businessmen; they usually have 25 bodyguards."

Russia's capitalists have spent millions of dollars for protection. They have bought armor-plated cars, bomb sensors, hidden cameras, bulletproof vests, anti-wiretapping gear and thousands of weapons. They have recruited bull-necked veterans of the Afghan and Chechen wars as their bodyguards.

But money has not bought them peace. Street crime is not the issue — it is contract killings, such as the gunning down of an American businessman, Paul Tatum, at a Moscow subway entrance last year. Tatum was involved in a dispute over a hotel partially owned by the city of Moscow. His assassin has never been found.

Murder for hire also has stalked Russian bankers. In the last four years, said Vitaly Sidorov, executive director of the Association of Russian Banks, 116 attempts have been made on the lives of Russian bankers and their workers, or one every few weeks. Seventy-nine of them were killed. He said the assassins and their clients have not been apprehended "in 80 to 90 percent of the cases."


Gun law . . . Officers from the Ministry of Internal Affairs surround a group of suspects. The tide of thuggery stems from a failure to establish the rule of law PHOTOGRAPH: ALEXANDER ZEMLIANICHENKO

As legitimate Russian businesses and foreign firms are forced to confront the underside of Russian capitalism, they often turn to the murky world of the Russian institution known as the *krysha*, which literally means "roof." As a slang word, krysha refers to a criminal protection racket, such as a gang that extorts money from a store owner.

But in Russia's wild post-Soviet capitalism, the concept of krysha has taken on yet another, much broader meaning.

Almost every business in Russia — from curbside vendors to huge oil and gas companies, American and foreign firms, even mayors and regional bosses — pays for the protection service of some kind of krysha, according to security experts here.

Olga Kryshtanovskaya, head of the department of elite studies at the Institute of Sociology, said that a krysha or, more broadly, as she put it, a "private power structure" is now an essential feature of large Russian corporate oligarchies.

Businessmen say they need the krysha because the laws and court system that regulate economic activity in other countries are not functioning in Russia. Post-Soviet civil and criminal codes have been approved but are often ignored. The cutthroat battles over property and capital are often carried out in a twilight zone where there is no clear line between legal and illegal.

Legitimate businessmen say the only way they can enforce a contract is to turn to a krysha. Many firms call their krysha a "security department" and use it primarily to protect themselves from criminal extortion rackets. But experts say some firms use their security forces to thrive in a lawless marketplace — using kryshas to intimidate competitors, enforce contracts, collect debts or take over new markets.

At the same time, for many smaller businesses a krysha is an unwelcome and dangerous protection racket run by organized crime syndicates, who use extortion and threats to extract payments.

It is also becoming increasingly common for Russian businesses to turn to the "red krysha," which refers to the police, who double as a paid protection racket. The bodyguards protecting Naumov were a "red krysha."

The killing of Naumov triggered an angry letter sent to three Moscow newspapers in which officers of the elite Saturn unit claimed their superiors had not told them they were guarding a gangster. They said they were outraged not by their assignment but by their low pay.

"The rank-and-file officers were getting just kopecks for risking their lives, while the leadership was literally grabbing millions," they wrote. "We will not be surprised if again we will be sent to guard mafia for such contracts, while our leaders will be getting millions without even leaving their warm rooms."

Grapes of Wrath

Colman McCarthy

THE FIGHT IN THE FIELDS
Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers Movement
By Susan Ferriss and Ricardo Sandoval
Harcourt Brace. 333pp. $25

IN THE EARLY spring of 1996, I spent some time in the Imperial Valley in California interviewing attorneys for farmworkers. Among other crops, two thirds of the nation's strawberries are grown in this vast area, with the land owned by corporate giants yielding profits, on average, between $12,000 and $15,000 an acre. Little of that reached the strawberry pickers. Their lowly wages were estimated at $8,500 for six to eight months of stoop labor on land fertilized by methyl bromide, a potent toxic due to be banned by the Environmental Protection Agency in 2001.

The talk last spring centered on the United Farmworkers Union's success in organizing more than 15,000 strawberry workers. In 1996, no union drive was larger. In addition to the benefits to workers, the organizing served as a testament that the energies and ideals of Cesar Chavez lived on. What he had begun in 1962 in Delano, California — *el movimiento*, the movement to win labor justice for impoverished and often brutalized farmworkers — had endured into the mid-1990s.

By his unexpected death in late April 1993 at age 66, Chavez had earned a place in the company of other heroes of American labor such as Mother Jones, Walter Reuther and others — who stood up to the vile greed of corporate profiteers and won economic gains rightfully owed workers. More than 40,000 mourners came to Chavez's funeral. He didn't drink or smoke. He exercised and ate healthy, vegetarian, pesticide-free food and often fasted. This man who lived a Franciscan regimen appears to have died in the manner of St. Francis: of exhaustion. Chavez, who pushed his body to the limits, told a son-in-law the night before his death, "I'm tired . . . I'm really very tired."

Susan Ferriss and Ricardo Sandoval, a pair of California newspeople are careful biographers with a sense of both the historical significance of Chavez and the positive impact he had on the lives of farmworkers. Until Chavez, the son of an illiterate Mexican migrant worker, few others noticed the sufferings of America's fruit and vegetable pickers. Chavez knew at an early age in the 1930s that no other laborers toiled as hard or died as young.

"When Chavez started the movement in the 1960s," the authors write, "farmworkers had precious little with which to defend themselves. They didn't have the legal right to organize and vote for collective bargaining. They didn't have the right to have clean drinking water, access to portable toilets, lunch breaks, or short rest breaks during the workday. And they were not entitled to the minimum wage or unemployment insurance. Benefits such as health insurance, pensions, and paid vacations were dreams. Housing was horrible, and most migrant kids didn't have a chance of finishing high school — and nobody seemed to care."

Chavez did. The authors diligently explore two of the major sources of moral strength for Chavez: the social teachings of his Catholicism and Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolent conflict resolution. As did Martin Luther King Jr., Lech Walesa and Dorothy Day and other defiers of state power, Chavez practiced the Gandhian lesson that the goal is to bring adversaries to their senses, not their knees.

In 1969 during the grape boycott, a year when agribusiness in its congenital thickheadedness finally realized that the nation was siding with the farmworkers, Chavez wrote his "Open Letter to the Grape Industry." Though shorter, it is the equal, in both fervor and steel, to King's "Letter From Birmingham Jail." "We advocate," Chavez wrote, "militant nonviolence as our means for social justice and to achieve justice for our people . . . We do not hate you or rejoice to see your industry destroyed; we hate the agribusiness system that seeks to keep us enslaved and we shall overcome and change it not by retaliation or bloodshed but by a determined nonviolent struggle carried on by those masses of farmworkers who intend to be free and human."

And who, besides corporate exploiters, were on the other side opposing the farmworkers? Then-governor Ronald Reagan was one. During the national grape boycott, which he called "immoral," Reagan made a show of regularly eating grapes in public. And the Pentagon did its part by buying 11 million pounds of grapes at the peak of the boycott, shipping 2.5 million pounds to Vietnam in 1969.


ILLUSTRATION BY ANTHONY RUSSO

Murder on the Menu

Jacqueline Devel

THE BUTTER DID IT
A Gastronomic Tale of Love and Murder
By Phyllis Richman
HarperCollins. 311pp. $23

THE PAGES of most American novels are filled with people on the strictest of diets. Not the trendy low-fat kind, but pure starvation diets. Most of them simply don't eat; they certainly don't prepare food, let alone mention it. All that must happen furtively, off the page, where the reader is never invited. What an unreal, skinny world they inhabit.

Not so in Phyllis Richman's tasty first novel, The Butter Did It, in which her people talk of good food, prepare and consume fabulous meals, and share — sometimes even steal — secret recipes. Watching them eat makes you hunger for the taste of their dumplings, polenta salad and fritto misto, which is utterly possible because Richman provides the recipe.

Food occupies an admittedly heightened place in the lives of Richman's characters. After all, Chas Wheatly (like the author herself) is a restaurant critic for a leading Washington-based paper, and she relentlessly pursues the best crabcake, the finest dining room, and the most delectable morsels in town on behalf of her avid readers. Her grown daughter, with whom she enjoys a loving if somewhat crusty friendship, morphs into a picky eater around Mom — a minor defiance. The chefs, whose kitchens and dining rooms compete for that crucial rave review in Chas's column, live to cook. Then one of them is murdered.

The novel opens as chef Laurence Levain is preparing his world-famous "quilts," elegant translucent salmon-and-herb pasta priced at $20 per single four-inch piece. The quilts will be served the following evening at a gala charity benefit for which famous chefs prepare their signature dishes. He finishes late at night and has several glasses of Calvados at home with a companion. The night ends badly for Laurence — he winds up dead.

Chas becomes consumed by Laurence's death — they were once lovers. She first met him in Paris when he was in his teens and already devoted to a life in the kitchen. She was in her twenties, stuck in a disappointing, colorless marriage to another chef. Laurence whisked her off on a lusty pleasure tour of the open air markets where he fed her sausages and fresh raw peas from the pod, wild strawberries and cream which he drizzled onto her outstretched tongue. Their appetites only increased, and soon they were in bed.

Detective Homer Jones, a suave man who'd rather talk about cooking than murder, believes that Laurence's death was "a natural" — simply a heart attack. After all, trappings from a kinky love tryst are evident about Laurence's room, and the 42-year-old chef had a history of heart disease. Chas knows Laurence too well and convinces Homer that Laurence would never have entertained a woman the night before an important cooking event because he simply could not perform in bed. Her suspicions prove correct when an autopsy shows that Laurence died of an overdose of his heart medicine, digoxin.

Chas's hunt for the murderer quickly becomes perilous when a threat on her voice mail makes her realize that she too could become a target for murder, and an easy one at that. After all, her job requires her to eat in restaurants every day, where it would be relatively easy for someone to dose her food. Her anxieties are realized when the murderer strikes again. But this time the victim survives.

The murder attempt spurs Chas on: She is determined to find Laurence's killer, the person who is preventing her from enjoying a good meal. One by one she slyly approaches Laurence's girlfriend, his sister, his business partners, his rival chefs, her ex-husband (once Laurence's mentor) — and, along the way, the reader is treated to a highly amusing exposure of the cutthroat and demanding restaurant world. With the help of Homer Jones, her best friend Sherele and her daughter Lily, Chas homes in on the murderer, whose motive turns out to be highly unusual and very culinary.

Richman's novel tells us what it's like to be a restaurant critic, obliged to consume many bad meals and too few exceptional ones, all the while tolerating sycophantic chefs and restaurant publicists. More, The Butter Did It reveals the particular world of the big city newsroom.

Most of all, The Butter Did It is a lively tale told with wit and high spirits. Chas's somewhat prickly and independent nature and her willingness to see the humorous side of any situation make her an entertaining sleuth, a heroine we want to spend time with and a gourmet we'd be happy to join for dinner.

Words So Good They Should Be Eaten

Paula L. Woods

SOUL KISS
By Shay Youngblood
Riverhead. 207pp. $21

"THE FIRST evening Mama doesn't come back, I make a sandwich with the leaves from her good-bye letter. I want to eat her words. I stare at the message written on the stiff yellow paper as if the shaky scrawl would stand up and speak to me." So begins Soul Kiss, the intelligent and erotic novel by playwright and Pushcart Prize-winning author Shay Youngblood.

Sure in its emotional footing and confident in its narrative voice, Soul Kiss takes the conventions of the coming-of-age novel and subverts them through a richly imagined story with the ring of a fable yet is nuanced and shaded by the author's unique vision. The protagonist is 7-year-old Mariah Santos, recently left by her mother in an unnamed rural Georgia town. There she is haunted by a house with wooden stairs that complain in the dark under the weight of her red-skinned, hulking Aunt Merleen, and of Aunt Faith, who appears like a silvery angel with a voice "as soft as Mama's scarf." These familial witches inhabit a vastly different world from the magical one that Mariah and her mother, Coral, had made for themselves on a military base in Manhattan, Kansas, where the young girl would leave for school carrying her word for the day written out by her mother on pink paper.

For all the glowing hues of these remembered times, Coral and Mariah's lives are suffused with blue, "the color of sad music," the color most associated with Mariah's mysteriously absent father, a painter named Matisse Santos whom Coral met in California and who, in her words, "stained me with passion." Mariah is captivated by the spell of these stories and the vision of her father with "pale blue paint all over his face and arms. I grew to love him too." Youngblood constructs these early passages flawlessly, immersing the reader in a fairy-tale landscape that is made even more magical when recalled by Mariah in the ordinary Georgia world she despises.

However, we learn that all was not well in Kansas, that some unknown terror lurked just beneath the surface there. Mariah's mother suffered a nervous breakdown, brought on in part by her failed love affair with a married doctor on the Army base where they both worked. At first that illness was just a tiny speck in the fairy-tale landscape: Mother and daughter ate directly from tin cans to avoid lighting a stove because Mother was tired. But by the time Coral took Mariah to live with her aunts, she was discreetly sipping from a brown medicine bottle in her purse — a deeply disturbed woman.

Her mother's legacy of illness and cloistered, almost sensual love for her daughter — coupled with Mariah's intense longing for a father she has never known — sends the girl in search of satisfaction anywhere she can find it, whether with a "girly-girl" playmate, a minor-league baseball player, or a man whose voice seems to her like "a blues song that turns out all right." After a sojourn with her father in California, Mariah begins to sense the deep conflicts within her father, whom she loves most desperately but also wants to become, at one point even furtively trying on his white suit and shoes. The author's exploration of this uncomfortable terrain is filled with foreboding. Yet Youngblood's tracing of father and daughter's fumbling attempts to create a family never stoops to sensationalism or mere plot devices to sustain dramatic tension.

When she begins to trust her father, Mariah tells him, "I want to make words so delicious that people will want to eat them." Youngblood has more than achieved that herself. Full of layers as rich as the red velvet cake Mariah makes for Aunt Faith, the immensely engrossing and satisfying Soul Kiss will make you hungry for more from Youngblood.

How to improve the state of welfare

Limits to state aid are political, not economic, argues **Tony Atkinson**

Welfare Reform latest...
WE'VE GOT TO THINK THE UNTHINKABLE...
SPEAK THE UNSPEAKABLE
DO THE UNDOABLE
SMELL THE UNSMELLABLE...

DEBATE about the future of the welfare state is about to start in earnest. The role of social protection in the 21st century is one of the most important questions facing Europe's leaders.

In Britain, the question is whether to continue further along the Conservative path of dismantling the social transfer system, relying on private provision with only a residual state safety net. For Britain's European neighbours, the question is whether they should maintain a social insurance system in which those in work make substantial transfers to those not in work.

Has Britain made a terrible mistake? Or will France and Germany follow Margaret Thatcher's lead? Is there a third way?

Britain's post-war National Insurance system pays flat-rate, rather than the earnings-related benefits of Germany and France. But the Beveridge ideal was based firmly on social insurance: in work, people contributed to benefits which could be paid as of right, not subject to a test of means. During the sixties and seventies Britain moved closer to the Continental pattern, introducing earnings-related supplements to unemployment and sickness benefit, and pensions.

After 1979, this convergence stopped. Benefits, including earnings-related supplements, were cut or abolished. Replacement of unemployment insurance by the Job Seekers' Allowance, and the reduction of the basic pension relative to earnings, have taken Britain away from the European model.

Just how far Britain now differs from its European Union partners is illustrated by the forecasts of state spending on pensions as a proportion of gross domestic product. The projections for 2020, for example, show 12 per cent in France and 14 per cent in Germany, with further rises to come. But in the UK they are around 5 per cent and falling.

Some European finance ministers may look enviously at Britain's figures and conclude that their countries have no option but to follow. But the economic constraints are exaggerated. Politicians have more room to manoeuvre than they like to admit. The opening up of the world economy, and information technology, have made cheaper sources of supply and new products available.

The question is how the gains should be shared — between and within countries.

Market forces may have reduced the demand for unskilled labour, causing unemployment and widening wage differentials. But in the past, increased inequality of market income has been met by a combination of progressive taxation and the welfare state.

Politicians argue that the cost of social protection is now too high, as a result of the worsening economic and demographic situation. But "too high" can be an economic or a political judgment.

In some situations, Sweden in the eighties, for example, rates of taxation rose to a level which had demonstrable negative economic effects. But this is not the case with taxation in Britain today. Labour has apparently decided that voters are not willing to pay for increased social transfers. But the electorate can be led as well as followed.

There are choices. Europe could follow the lead of Britain, or Britain could rejoin the European model. Both approaches have their disadvantages. It is often alleged that the social insurance system favours workers in regular employment at the expense of those in precarious or temporary jobs; it makes inadequate allowance for part-time work and does not recognise the contributions of carers. It is designed for the 19th, not the 21st century.

But the British experiment of the past 18 years has thrown up problems of its own. A key feature has been the growth of means-testing. The balance of spending has switched, with social insurance falling from [illegible] per cent of social security spending between 1978 and 1992, and means-tested benefits rising from 17 to 33 per cent. As a consequence, Britain now has more of the population on social assistance than other EU members. One person in six is living in a family in receipt of assistance, compared with one in 20 in Germany.

The growth of means-testing was deplored by Labour spokesmen in opposition — for good reason. Means tests penalise those who make their own efforts to improve their circumstances, creating poverty, unemployment and savings "traps". It is ironic that increased reliance by the Tories on means-testing undermined some of their central policy initiatives, such as providing incentives for people to take jobs or to make their own provision for retirement.

The current British strategy makes no sense. A programme of "welfare to work" cannot be based on a system of means-testing. People can feel little encouragement to take out private pensions if the only result is for their Income Support to be reduced pound for pound. People who work or save should get something for their efforts — a principle which applies as much at the bottom as at the top.

What is more, this safety net is not fully effective. Many Britons still live on low incomes. Figures published recently showed poverty higher in Britain than in any European country other than Portugal.

There are alternatives. Some are more attractive at first sight than on close examination. People propose a merger of the tax and benefit systems, with income tax assessments used to determine benefit entitlements. But the two systems were designed for different purposes. For instance, income tax is now largely based on individual circumstances, rather than those of the family.

Other ideas seem more worthy of study. Social security does not need to be delivered by state agencies. Benefits could be the responsibility of bodies more directly accountable to their members to allow greater flexibility of individual choice.

One of the issues which needs to be addressed is whether to go for some form of "basic" or "citizen's" income. In its pure form, the citizen's income would replace all existing social insurance and assistance benefits with a single payment, paid unconditionally and on an individual basis without a means test. However, it is a mistake to see citizen's income as an alternative to social insurance. Citizen's income should be complementary, reducing dependence on means-tested benefits.

But this is not enough to ensure political support. A major reason for opposition to citizen's income is the fact that it is unconditional: some worry that it leads to dependency.

I believe that the citizen's income should be conditional on participation in society. The definition of "participation" would include people at work, those retired, sick or unemployed; in education or training; and caring for dependants. The condition is not paid work; it is a wider definition of social contribution.

For both Britain and its European neighbours, the welfare state should, and can, take new directions. There is no need to repent the mistakes of the past.

Tony Atkinson is Warden of Nuffield College, Oxford

FOREIGN EXCHANGES

	Sterling rates June 9	Sterling rates June 3
Australia	2.1455-2.1480	2.1506-2.1529
Austria	19.64-19.66	19.82-19.84
Belgium	57.56-57.66	58.15-58.19
Canada	2.2648-2.2667	2.2476-2.2496
Denmark	10.62-10.63	10.73-10.73
France	9.43-9.43	9.50-9.51
Germany	2.7907-2.7932	2.8175-2.8197
[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]
Ireland	1.0802-1.0822	1.0872-1.0892
Italy	2,756-2,758	2,772-2,774
Japan	184.13-184.38	190.12-190.34
Netherlands	3.1395-3.1428	3.1706-3.1730
New Zealand	2.3647-2.3683	2.3708-2.3736
Norway	11.62-11.62	11.68-11.69
Portugal	282.65-282.95	284.23-284.51
Spain	238.25-238.53	238.05-238.31
Sweden	12.66-12.68	12.71-12.72
Switzerland	2.3481-2.3504	2.3338-2.3365
USA	1.6338-1.6346	1.6325-1.6332
ECU	1.4338-1.4370	1.4464-1.4479

FTSE100 Share Index up 123.9 at 4666.7. FTSE 250 Index up 2.9 at 4464.1. Gold down $0.50 at $344.25.

In Brief

AT THE inaugural meeting of the Bank of England's monetary policy committee, the nine-member body raised interest rates a quarter-point, to 6.5 per cent — the second UK rate rise since the election last month.

LEISURE group Rank reached swift agreement with Xerox corporation over the sale of its remaining 20 per cent stake in copier company Rank Xerox. The deal with yield Rank $1.6 billion.

CABLE & WIRELESS prised open the door to China's telecommunications market in a $1.18 billion deal with the Chinese government. It is to sell China a 5.5 per cent stake in its Hong Kong Telecom subsidiary in return for a direct stake in China's telecoms industry.

GRANADA has sold Brown's Hotel to Raffles, the Singapore hotel which was once home-from-home to Noël Coward, Somerset Maugham and Joseph Conrad, for $73.5 million.

GRAND Metropolitan has lost control of Smirnoff after a Moscow arbitration court is reported to have ruled that the trademark belongs to former KGB officer Boris Smirnoff, great grandson of Peter Smirnoff, supplier of vodka to the last tsar.

INSPECTORS from the Bank of England are believed to be investigating the dealing activities of the the London-based Moscow Narodny Bank, once the finance capital arm of the Soviet Union.

ALAN SUGAR stands to net $228 million after cashing in his chips at Amstrad, the UK firm which brought computers to the masses in the eighties.

Dedicated staff with opposing ideas can lead to a damaging stalemate, but mediation now offers a way forward. **Andrew Woodgate** reports

Cool look at heated debates

ALL ORGANISATIONS experience differences of opinion within their ranks from time to time, and voluntary organisations are no different. Indeed, the voluntary sector may be at even higher risk of internal difficulties, populated as it often is by highly committed people with strongly-held, but often very different, viewpoints.

Most of these internal debates are creative and stimulating — a part of what makes the sector such an exciting environment in which to work. But sometimes, differences in opinion can lead to entrenchment, stagnant working relationships and organisations split by dissent.

Earlier this year, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) launched its Mediation Service, specifically designed to help voluntary organisations caught up in internal disputes. Organisations are put in touch with a trained panel of experienced mediators. They come from a range of backgrounds, but have one essential common denominator: a history of working with voluntary and community organisations.

The service isn't just designed for senior executives and trustees; it is also open to paid staff, volunteers or members, and all calls are handled in the strictest confidence.

The NCVO had been running the service as a pilot project for 18 months. It was originally called the Dispute Resolution Service, but this was thought to be too negative and off-putting, and placing too much emphasis on painful dispute, rather than solutions. So the service was renamed.

Mediation is becoming an increasingly popular technique for finding a mutually acceptable way out of a problem. But what exactly does it involve? It is sometimes perceived to be about arbitration or judgment, but, in reality, the process is about providing an opportunity to explore why disputes have actually happened in the first place, and looking for solutions.

The only requirement for those involved is to be willing to find alternatives to continuing their dispute. Mediation is helpful in resolving many difficult situations, whether it is a case of antagonism between charity trustees over mission and strategy, or differences of opinion between volunteers or members because of competing claims about an organisation's future direction. In some cases, lack of clarity about people's roles has led to a breakdown in trust and poor working practices between staff and trustees, and mediation can help here too.

Once all parties agree to mediation, a mediator contacts all those involved. A comfortable, neutral venue for the session is chosen, one where confidentiality can be ensured. The mediator works with all parties to design a process that allows everyone to express their concerns and viewpoints to one another. Those involved are invited to comment on and agree all the steps of the suggested process. They may agree to exchange relevant documents in advance of the session. In some circumstances, mediators work in pairs, thus offering a wider range of strategies to all parties.

Together, all those involved explore the issues to see if greater common understanding can be reached. Where possible, the mediator encourages participants to identify ways of lessening both the pain caused to the individuals concerned and the damage done to the organisation. He or she supports the efforts of those involved to find a solution to their differences, but it is up to the parties to reach — and to uphold — their own agreement, written or otherwise, on how to solve the problem. Ultimately, the success or failure of the mediation process depends on the commitment and determination of the different parties.

One of the mediators involved in the projects says: "Often people get so caught up in their own view of the dispute that they can't hear the other side any more. As a mediator, one thing I can do is provide a forum where each side can really listen to the other, sometimes for the first time." The success of the pilot project was recognised recently when NCVO received funding from Britain's Department of National Heritage so that the Mediation Service could continue and increase its activities.

Users of the service have found mediation a useful way of moving a difficult situation forward, but are realistic about the potential outcomes. "It helped to produce a process that was agreeable to the parties," commented one participant from an organisation based in the Midlands. "The mediator met all my expectations and quickly established trust and confidence. Only time will tell us if it was successful."

As a result of receiving government funding, NCVO will be able to push the resolution of internal disputes higher up the voluntary sector's agenda. It is planning a package of events and publications to provide practical help to the sector. A short guide to dealing with disputes is to be published, and there will be a one-day conference in the summer. There are also plans to offer senior managers and trustees training in a whole range of dispute-resolution techniques later in the year.

Andrew Woodgate is co-ordinator of the Mediation Service. Further information about the service is available from NCVO on (+44)171-713 6161

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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WORKER (Credit), **MALI** to work with Action on Disability & Development (ADD), supporting its credit & small business activities.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT WORKER, WEST BANK/GAZA to work with the Palestinian Hydrology Group, advising on how a social and participatory approach can be integrated into its work.

HUMAN RIGHTS WORKER, WEST BANK/GAZA to join the Birzeit University Human Rights Action Project, documenting and monitoring human rights violations and providing support in local and international networking.

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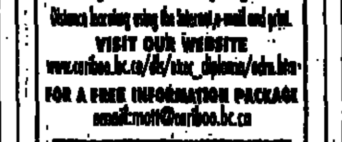
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In Denmark, the cyclist is king

David Harrison in Copenhagen finds a city that has declared war on the private motor car

IN A LARGE, cool office high in Copenhagen's imposing city hall, the mayor leans over the table, swigs from her teatime bottle of Carlsberg and vows: "We will win the fight."

The fight is to ban cars from the centre of the Danish capital. Not for shoppers and tourists, but for the 200,000 commuters who use their cars only to drive to and from work. As a warm-up, Charlotte Ammundsen predicts that, by next year, motorists will have to pay to bring their cars into central Copenhagen.

Laudable ambitions, but to someone from smog-choked London, they seem unnecessary. Copenhagen, where the mayor's Carlsberg is made, is probably the greenest capital city in the world. Its clean air, low number of cars and efficient public transport system put most other cities to shame. But Ammundsen wants more. "There is still a lot to do to become greener."

Outside, around the huge square in front of the town hall, light traffic glides by. Cars and taxis move freely, jams are rare, buses frequent and bicycles everywhere. The city has nearly 300km of bicycle lanes, many as wide as the roadspace for cars. Some 124,000 cyclists ride into the centre every day. Denmark might have a very popular Queen, Margrethe, but in Copenhagen the bicycle is king.

Cyclists are a powerful group. Many belong to the Danish Bicyclists Union, a formidable lobby with more influence than some political parties. They have little time for cars polluting their city, home since 1973 to the world's first environment ministry; home to the European Environment Agency; and likely to be the only city to meet the United Nations' latest target for reducing carbon dioxide emissions.



No bike? No excuse: 'city bikes' are available at coin-release stands

Even taxi-drivers must look after the all-powerful cyclist. Caught in a downpour? The cyclist hails a cab, and the driver puts the bike on a simple metal frame — carried in the boot and hooked on to the back of the cab. The driver, who must comply or face a penalty, charges a supplement of about $1.50 for the service.

There is no excuse for not cycling. No bike? Help yourself to one of 2,000 free ones available from cycle parks all over the centre. These "city bikes" are released by inserting the equivalent of $3 into a slot on the frame. The money is recovered when the bike is left at any other bike park, similar to the system used for supermarket trolleys in many countries.

Few city bikes are stolen — though a "souvenir" turned up in New York — mainly because they are not high-quality machines and are recognisable by their gaudily coloured wheels bearing the names of sponsors. But they are adequate for getting around the centre, and the scheme, now in its third year, has been a success.

The number of cars in Denmark is controlled by crippling import taxes that vary according to the car's green credentials based on engine size and the type of petrol it uses. The 30,000 kroner ($4,500) price of a Skoda, for example, would become 90,000 kroner with tax. This, combined with heavy road tax, has helped to keep car ownership down to 25 per cent in Copenhagen.

An anti-car culture has also helped the crusade. Cars are not status symbols the way they are in other countries. Danes consider interior-designed houses more prestigious. "It is quite normal to see well-off people with a beautiful house and a battered old car," said Christina Holm of the city's Visitors' Bureau.

Urban planning and legislation also help to keep commuters out of their cars. No factory can be built more than one kilometre from a train station. Many areas, especially the main squares and shopping areas, are free of traffic. Shoppers can stroll for hundreds of metres without having to cross a road.

Queen Margrethe is regularly tempted from her Amalienborg palace to stroll down the streets of her capital. Somehow it's hard to picture Elizabeth II window-shopping along Oxford Street.

In Copenhagen, the Queen might feel like abandoning the royal carriage for one of the city's clean and punctual yellow buses, whose efficiency is helped by bus lanes with their own traffic lights, allowing them to move ahead of the rest of the traffic. One in five is a fast "S" bus, stopping only at every fourth stop. Forty-seven gas-powered buses come into use in September.

The bus service is managed by the public-sector Copenhagen Traffic (CT) and operated by private companies obliged by contract to meet tough service and green standards. More buses have to be provided, to accommodate cyclists, in bad weather.

One idea being tested — "countdowns" at bus stops, informing passengers how long until the next bus arrives — was inspired by London Transport, proving London is not hopelessly behind Copenhagen in all aspects of green transport. London Transport has also had more success than CT in persuading its government to lower taxes on diesel fuel.

CT's aim is to lure 20 per cent more commuters on to the buses by 2005 and stabilise the number of cars entering the city after a surprising 6 per cent rise last year. Next year, it will spend $16 million promoting the bus service. CT's research suggests one-third of car owners do not want to drive to work but do so out of habit.

One project that could undermine the city's efforts to contain the car is the $2.4 billion road and rail tunnel under the Oresund linking Denmark to Sweden, due to be completed in 2000. "Scandinavia's Channel tunnel" — combined with a doubling of the size of Copenhagen airport — is expected to give a huge boost to the Danish economy, and will also bring an increase in traffic. But Copenhagen officials do not believe the link will bring more cars into the city centre, and say the tunnel is being built under the strictest environmental criteria yet applied to such a project, and that the road tolls ($25 a crossing) will pay for the rail link.

So could Copenhagen be the model for British cities in the struggle to contain the car and clean the air? Domingo Jiménez-Beltrán, executive director of the European Environment Agency, thinks not. He says the car lobby is too powerful in countries that, unlike Denmark, have a car industry.

But Denmark's environment minister Svend Auken disagrees. "We have a strong roads consumer lobby," he said, talking in his ministerial car en route to the ferry to Malmö. "But government policy can manage demand. "If you want a first-class public transport system, you have to put a lot of money into it. Our taxes are high but people are prepared to pay for good services." — *The Observer*

The 10 most sought-after endangered species

1 Giant Panda Although habitat loss and poaching are the major threats, demand from zoos for popular mating projects has encouraged China to remove pandas from the wild

2 Alligator snapping turtle Caught off North America and exported to Asia where it appears in turtle soup

3 Sturgeon Have to be killed to harvest the caviar. Population declining in the Baltic as demand soars

5 Hawksbill turtle Sea turtle hunted for its shell which is used in "tortoise shell"

4 Asian tiger Bones are used in traditional Asian medicine. A tiger skeleton can yield more profit than some Asians earn in 10 years

6 Green-cheeked parrot Huge market in the United States for the Mexican bird which is a highly prized pet

7 Mako shark One of a number of endangered shark species which are being fished to the point of extinction

8 Black rhino Ground horn used in Chinese medicine. Whole horns coveted as carved dagger handles in the Middle East

9 Big leaf mahogany Slow-growing hardwood from the Amazon basin prized in the West as a material for furniture

10 Goldenseal Herb gathered in North America. Traditionally used by Native Americans as a cure for liver problems. Now sold in the West as over-the-counter remedy for hay fever

GRAPHIC: PADDY ALLEN, KAMAL AHMED Source: WWF

Wildlife at the mercy of fatal fads

Kamal Ahmed

BE CAREFUL what you eat, what you wear and what you take for a streaming nose. A growing desire for the latest trends in foods, fashion and alternative medicine is driving many of the world's most endangered species to the edge of extinction.

A report by the World Wildlife Fund released last week reveals that the market for products as diverse as shark, caviar and parrots, is growing so rapidly that producers are decimating populations of endangered animals. Rare plants are also suffering.

The report says many consumers are unaware of the damage they are causing. Goldenseal, a herb collected from the forests of North America, is found in many over-the-counter hay fever remedies.

"By doing a little research before they buy anything from food to furniture, individuals can make a critical difference," said Ginette Hemley, WWF director of international wildlife policy.

The report, released in the United States, lists the 10 species of animals and plants most wanted by those keen to try the latest fads. At the head of the list is the black rhino, of which there are fewer than 2,500 in the wild. Poachers grind down the horn to make traditional Chinese medicines. The horns are also used to make ceremonial dagger handles in Yemen.

Other animals and plants on the list include the beluga sturgeon, the big leaf mahogany tree and the hawksbill turtle.

The sturgeon is widely fished in the Caspian Sea for its eggs, which are used to make caviar. The population of the fish, one of the oldest known animals dating from 250 million years ago, has declined by 70 per cent.

The big leaf mahogany is made into sought-after furniture for the Western market. It is a slow-growing hardwood which is found in the Amazon basin, and the WWF report estimates that as much as 70 per cent of the trees have been stripped out of some forests.

Shark species are also being hit, the meat now being used in upmarket restaurants as a cheaper alternative to swordfish and fresh tuna. The amount of shark imported to the European Union increased from 27,100 tonnes in 1980 to 42,000 in 1994.

The WWF report came out a week before the 10th meeting of the Convention on International Trade on Endangered Species (Cites) in Harare, Zimbabwe.

Letter from Bangladesh Adrienne Thompson

Ties that bind

FOUR DAYS after we returned to Bangladesh a thundery downpour sluiced off the trees and cleaned away the thick mixture of smog and dust. The wind swung northward, we put blankets back on to beds and prepared to enjoy the first flowering trees of the hot weather without the inconvenience of the heat. People don't believe us when we insist that Bangladesh is beautiful. In our town the roads may be rubbish-strewn, but they're lined with coconut and date palms and the occasional ancient mango tree. Dazzling kingfishers and flamboyant bronze bee-eaters decorate the murky green surfaces of our many ponds and canals.

We'd forgotten the noises, though. Our first morning home we were disturbed by a discordant blend of bus horns, jangling rickshaw bells, the call to prayer from at least six separate mosques, and the duet of crow and cuckoo incessantly repeating their own names — Kak! Kak! Ko-el! Ko-el! — the former as harsh as the latter was shrill.

Our neighbours soon came to visit. The women squatted and sat on my veranda, careful at all times to keep their heads covered with the tails of their saris. The gossip was mostly of marriage, weddings and divorces, liaisons and desertions. Sharp-featured, wall-eyed Fatima asked me: "Have you heard the good news? Yasmin is married."

But that didn't seem like such good news to me. Yasmin is 13. I've known her since she was six. Married? Her mother came to see me. I waited for her to tell me the news. She didn't. Instead she invited me to visit them. The next afternoon I followed her tall teenage son along the main road, down a brick-paved side street and on to a muddy track marked with prints of goats, cows, dogs and hens, as well as humans.

The house, a rented one, stood on the edge of town, backing on to fields already green with young rice. Built of sheets of tin nailed on to a wooden frame, it had wooden shutters, and a mud floor. The two rooms were small but looked large and bare in the absence of any furniture but a bed, a wire-fronted cupboard and a little table. As I entered, Yasmin came up and hugged me tightly around the neck. She wore some of the marks of marriage: a spangled "teep" in the centre of her forehead, a gold chain around her neck and 20 or so cheap bangles on each thin arm. But she still wore the salwar kameez trouser and tunic set of girlhood, not a woman's sari.

I asked her about her marriage. She told me it wasn't exactly a marriage but an engagement. "He will let me study up to class ten. Then he will take me." She spoke quietly, resignedly.

They ushered me to the little table and brought water, brownish but clean, from the tube well. A dozen curious faces appeared at the windows, but my hosts closed the shutters against them while I ate: sweet noodle pudding followed by hot rice, with well spiced but chewy lumps of beef. I ate hugely and they exclaimed over the smallness of my appetite. When I insisted that I couldn't manage any more they brought me an empty bowl and water in a plastic jug, and I rinsed the greasy fingers of my right hand

IT WASN'T until a couple of days later that Yasmin's mother tried to explain the affair to me. "I was frightened. This young man has had an eye on Yasmin for months. He kept on pestering us to let him marry her. He threatened to take her anyway. Well, I've known it to happen — a girl abducted on her way to school and raped. I decided marriage would be better than that. After all, he's not such a bad man for a husband. He does have a job in the biscuit factory.

"Anyway," she concluded defensively "we did it properly. I got a legal certificate for her. It's not as if I'm letting him sleep with her. He's promised she can finish her schooling up to class ten. Yasmin says I've ruined her life, but it's not fair. I was frightened for her. It was for her sake."

The following day I watched Yasmin's little sister, 10-year-old Salma, dashing about with a borrowed badminton racket. Seeing me, she asked if she could come to my house to collect a piece of embroidery Yasmin left with me last year. Of course, but tell Yasmin to come too.

Salma looked embarrassed. No, her big sister can't come to see me any more. A married woman doesn't have that sort of freedom.

Notes & Queries Joseph Harker

***HOW DO** you solve a cryptic crossword? Does it take a certain illogical way of thinking or am I just, basically, blind to the obvious?*

CROSSWORDS certainly require a different way of thinking. Behind the puns, anagrams, hidden words, etc, that make up the meat of most clues, the essence of crossword language lies in the so-called "use/mention" distinction in linguistics. When, for instance, I say "Tony Blair is the Prime Minister", I am using the words "Tony Blair" to refer to the political leader currently occupying Downing Street. However, when I say "Tony Blair has nine letters", I am merely mentioning the two words and the human being they commonly refer to is not the subject of this sentence.

You have to work out when words are being used so that you have to think of a synonym, and when they are being mentioned so that you have to think of the structure of the word itself.

A typical example from a recent crossword by Gordius is: "Lear unfortunately began his madness by letting it go (5)." The answer is "realm".

Most clues come in two parts, one to provide a definition for the solution and one to explain how it is made up, but in this one the whole clue points to the solution in two different ways. One is the obvious sense in which Lear abandoned his country when he became mad. The other is when the letters of "Lear" are, unfortunately, mixed up (to make "real") and combined with the beginning of madness ("m"). — *Donald Baillie, Penicuik, Scotland*

***WHAT** does humble pie consist of, and who baked the first one?*

THE FIRST humble pie was baked in the 1060s by an Anglo-Saxon working in the kitchens of a Norman lord. At that time it was called "umble pie" The word umble comes from the Latin *lumbulus*, a small loin, and was the term used for the entrails of a deer. After the hunt the Norman lords and ladies feasted on the prime cuts of venison while the lower orders were given the umbles.

Today to eat humble pie means humiliation to show remorse, but humble's origins are quite different from humiliate, which derives from the Latin *humus*, meaning earth or ground. So don't make your enemy eat humble pie: just ask him to grovel in the dirt. — *Peter Sharp, Snells Beach, New Zealand*

***APART** from January 1, what new years are celebrated annually, and what astronomical or seasonal significance do they have?*

MEMBERS of the Bahá'í faith around the world fix their new year according to the astronomical equinox on March 21, the beginning of spring in the northern hemisphere and, for Baha'is, a time for both material and spiritual re-birth.

The Islamic calendar shows more variety in celebrating new year. Based on lunar months, giving a year of 354 days, the Islamic new year cycles slowly through the seasons. The Jewish and Chinese new years are also based on lunar months — although topped up with extra months at certain intervals to bring them back into line with the solar calendar. Diwali, the Hindu Festival of Light, is also the Hindu new year and occurs around the new moon in October or November.

The beginning of the year used in the West seems boring by comparison, although it does appear reliably at the same season every year. But the Eastern Orthodox churches still use the Julian calendar and so celebrate the first day of January thirteen days later. — *Gerald Warren, Jwaneng, Botswana*

Any answers?

***WHY** does it read as "Magdalen" College, Oxford, and sound like "Maudlin"?* — *Anne Kienle, Stockport*

***ALASKA** and Hawaii became states of the US states only after the second world war. What was their sovereign status before that?* — *Neil McKenna, Lane End, Buckinghamshire*

***WHY** "a different kettle of fish"?* — *Steve Wood, Munich, Germany*

Answers should be e-mailed to weekly@guardian.co.uk, faxed to 0171/44171-242 0985, or posted to The Guardian Weekly, 75 Farringdon Road, London EC1M 3HQ

Square dance

THEATRE
Michael Billington

SEX and passion. They are natural subjects for drama. But they are also tricky to write about.

As the dramatist hero laments in Stoppard's The Real Thing, "Loving and being loved is unliterary. It's happiness expressed in banality and lust." But Patrick Marber gets around the problem in Closer at London's Cottesloe Theatre by dwelling as much on agony and deceit as on the lineaments of gratified desire. The result is that relatively rare thing, a good second play.

In his highly accomplished first work, Dealer's Choice, Marber showed us a group of male sad-sacks who use poker as an escape from real life. After seeing Closer, you begin to understand why. Marber seems to be saying that, while we pride ourselves on being cool and sophisticated about human relationships, we are as screwed up as ever. In particular, men and women, however honest they try to be, remain out of synch.

Marber makes his point through four characters whose lives accidentally converge. Dan, who writes for a newspaper's obits page, rescues a tough waif called Alice from a street crash. They fall in love but a year or so on, Dan, who has written a clunking first novel, goes to be photographed by a sexy snapper named Anna and is smitten. Initially spurned, he gets his revenge by setting up a blind date, via the Internet, between Anna and the surgeon Larry, who briefly examined Alice after her accident. Having cruelly played the role of a website Cupid, Dan finds he has unwittingly forged a real alliance.

What follows is a crazy sexual square dance in which partners are constantly swapped. Dan has an affair with the newly married Anna, while the bereft Larry seeks his revenge via Alice, now working in a posh, hands-off West End sex club. But what Marber conveys, through all the jumps in time and serial bed-hopping, is the extraordinary physical and emotional gulf between men and women. Anna describes how women disclose all their past emotional freight at the start of a relationship. With men, she claims, it's a more painful process: "A great big juggernaut arrives with their luggage — it got held up."

Marber takes no sides or prisoners in this candid, scathing, very modern view of the sex war. At different times, he suggests, we are all predators and victims. But, although he shows men and women behaving equally badly, he almost inevitably writes better about male torment. The most romantic character is Alice, the tough cookie who, we discover, has invented herself. The most complex is Larry, the working-class surgeon who gets to earn a fortune in private practice and whose pain is tangible.

Marber writes well, no question. But he lacks as yet an ability to see sex in a broader context. If the play seems a bit hermetic, it is because Marber only fleetingly relates sex to society. He is, however, a first-rate director of his own work. As in Dealer's Choice, he casts excellently. Liza Walker, as Alice, has exactly the right mix of orphaned solitude and street-wise smartness.

The men are equally sharply contrasted. Clive Owen's Dan has a boyish helplessness that is fatally attractive to women, while Ciaran Hinds's Larry is an upwardly mobile bruiser whose macho bullishness is secretly scorned by his lovers. It's a well-acted, highly satisfying play that touches on identity, sex and death, truth and illusion. But what lingers is Marber's sense that, however much they fraternise, men and women remain forever trapped inside their own skins.

A Faustian musical about baseball? It sounds an unlikely winner but **Damn' Yankees** at London's Adelphi Theatre coasts along pleasantly enough thanks to the upbeat numbers by Richard Adler and Jerry Ross and a charming performance by Jerry Lewis as a surprisingly dapper old devil. Joe Boyd, a suburban baseball nut, agrees to sell his soul to the Devil provided the no-hope Washington Senators can beat the invincible Yankees. Except that Joe, who is instantly transformed into a youthful Babe Ruth style of hero, demands an escape clause that if he chooses to return to home and hearth on the eve of the season's grand finale the deal is cancelled.

Whoever heard of a devil agreeing to conditions? But one has to remember that the show dates from 1955 and is, in reality, a hymn to the conservative, apple-pie virtues of Eisenhower's America.

Never mind: it has some pleasant songs and, on this occasion, Jerry Lewis who plays the Devil as a blazered smoothie with the slightly prim campness of Jack Benny.

It is a good example of the middle-ranking, mid-fifties American musical: not wildly exciting but harmlessly pleasant. What lifts it out of the rut is Jerry Lewis, who both exudes the weathered charm of an ageing golf pro and invests the proceedings with just the right degree of irony as when he turns to the audience, in the midst of some vaudevillean shtick, crying: "What a stupid way to earn a fortune!"



War of the sexes . . . Liza Walker and Clive Owen in Patrick Marber's Closer PHOTOGRAPH: HUGO GLENDINNING

The son who soared

OBITUARY
Jeff Buckley

FEW ROCK business careers began more tantalisingly than that of Jeff Buckley, who has drowned in the Mississippi river, aged 30. In 1991, record producer Hal Willner, known for assembling imaginative, star-studded tributes to Charles Mingus and Kurt Weill, put together a tribute concert for Jeff's father, Tim Buckley, at St Ann's Church, Brooklyn, New York. Tim had died of a heroin overdose in 1975, aged 28, but his early death ignited a slow-burning musical legend. It was founded on his recorded legacy in which soul, blues and jazz influences mingled freely, the process stirred by his arrestingly elastic vocal style.

His son Jeff, born in California during Tim's brief marriage to Panama-born Mary Guibert, had always been ambivalent about his father. Tim left Mary when Jeff was six months old, and his son was brought up by his mother and stepfather during a peripatetic childhood. "My childhood was pretty much marijuana and rock 'n' roll," Jeff recalled.

His decision to participate in Willner's tribute event launched Buckley Junior as a new phenomenon on the New York music scene, and simultaneously affirmed his quasi-mythic credentials, particularly when he performed his father's song "Once I Was". "It bothered me that I hadn't been to his funeral, that I've never been able to tell him anything," said Jeff. "I used that show to pay my last respects."

Thus launched in public, Buckley began performing at small Manhattan clubs where record company executives and A&R men were soon arriving by the limo-full, waving chequebooks. His remarkable voice (his most obvious inheritance from his father) and movie-star looks left nobody in doubt that he was a star in the making, though the eclecticism of his shows confused some listeners. Buckley would pluck songs out of the air as the mood took him. It might be something by Van Morrison, the Hollies or Big Star, or a tune made famous by Nina Simone or Mahalia Jackson.

With a hippie-esque suspicion of large corporations, he turned down several deals before signing with Columbia at the end of 1992. The disc was released in 1994 to instant critical adulation. The music was a cornucopia of rockers, ballads, hymns and even a bold rendition of Benjamin Britten's Corpus Christi Carol — by no means standard rock 'n' roll fare. His voice was wild, passionate and sensual. His music was bursting with hidden depths and infinite potential.

Buckley's inquisitiveness and musical ambition earned him acceptance across a broad spectrum of fellow performers. Elvis Costello brought him over in 1995 to perform at London's Meltdown Festival, and last year he featured on Patti Smith's comeback album, Gone Again. He was also a fan of Eastern music, particularly the Islamic devotional Qawwali songs of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan.

Adam Sweeting

Jeff Buckley, rock singer, born August 1, 1966; died May 29, 1997

Ever get that sinking feeling?

TELEVISION
Nancy Banks-Smith

ALL AT SEA (Channel 4) was the maiden voyage of Carnival Destiny, the biggest cruise liner in the world. More a brazen hussy than a maiden, Destiny was built for fun, fun, fun.

"We're in the happiness business . . . everything here makes Las Vegas look like baby food."

"This", said the girl with the amazing wraparound teeth, "is the karaoke bar. We have the microphones right at the table and, when you initiate the fact that you are ready to sing, the piano player hits you with a spotlight and you go right ahead and start to sing Feelings."

I would always advise you to eschew a ship where the purser is called Cassandra. A pleasant enough woman but cursed of God. "The problems we've incurred," said Cassandra, "have been mainly plumbing, electrical, air conditioning, noise complaints . . ." Then the central computer crashed.

You clung to the humanity of the crew as to driftwood.

Liam and Nick, a couple of Irish barmen hoping to get lucky, had invented the sweaty socks test. "Just throw them against the wall and, if they don't stick, you get another day or two out of them at least. If they bounce back, four days."

John, the cruise director, used to be a London stockbroker. (I don't know. I didn't like to ask.) He had been ordered to employ an accordionist called, he thought, Googleburger. An accordion did not fit into any of the aforementioned ambiences but Googleburger was a friend of a friend of a vice-president. Personally, I was sorry we never saw the man. I haven't heard an accordionist since John Moloney ("The Angry Accordion Player") appeared in the Seven Sisters Road to great acclaim with Otiz Canneloni ("He Ties Small Dogs in Knots"). Hans, the stressed chef, looked as if he'd already had a stroke. Would nine meals a day for 3,500 passengers prove too much, you worried away.

This was cruising for the million. As Mandy fastened Tom's cuff links, he said touchingly: "I kind of enjoy getting to play dressing up because we don't get to do it that often." Some might have expected them to choose a quieter honeymoon.

All At Sea could only be from Carlton and it was. I once saw a reporter approach Rex Harrison. "I'm from the Daily Sketch," he said. "You're just the sort of little shit who would be," said the star, and surged on.

If you'd rather savour solitude, *Tracks* (BBC 2) is the thing for you. A new series is a sure sign that summer is icumen in, lhude sing cuccu! You have to be cuccu to play. You could creep out at night and watch frogs mating. ("That one's desperate. He's trying to grab on to a couple who are already at it. This one's got a toad.")

Or you could search for amber in the teeth of a Cromer gale. Amber is said to ward off lions, which is always useful. There is a Secret Society of Amber Hunters but they are so secret they refused to appear on TV. Well done, lads. Or you could admire the myriad varieties of snowdrop upside-down. To appreciate snowdrops you have to lie down and look up. The ground will be damp. Snowdrops have a sense of humour. Richard Hobbs, a galanthus fan, said: "They can appear to be dead, it's so cold. Then they'll spring back up no bother at all when it warms up."

I know. When I was a small child, I had to stand on tables and entertain the grown-ups. My party piece was:

**"Where are the snowdrops?"
Said the sun.
"Dead" said the frost
"Buried and lost."
"A foolish answer" said the sun.
"They do not die
Asleep they lie.
And I will wake them
I, the sun,
Into the light
Clad in white
Everyone."**

I was so relieved when television came in. So, of course, were my audience.

On a freeway to sex, death and nihilism

CINEMA
Derek Malcolm

CRASH starts with three simulated sex scenes in rapid succession and ends with another. There are plenty more in between. But it isn't the sex so much as its setting that has frightened the good burghers of London's Westminster City Council. Dammit, one of the bouts involves someone in callipers.

Perhaps it is understandable, since the film suggests that the car crash is, in the words of Elias Koteas's Vaughan "a fertilising rather than destructive event — a liberation of sexual energy that mediates the sexuality of those who have died with an intensity impossible in any other form".

Westminster Council has replied to this eyebrow-raising if not mind-boggling incitement, as other local authorities will, by banning David Cronenberg's film, culled with some faithfulness from the pages of J G Ballard's unbanned novella (which never intended to approve of such sentiments, even if it expressed them with some eloquence).

That this is a bad mistake, only likely to encourage more to seek out the film than would otherwise have done so, seems self-evident, especially when the censor has granted it an 18 certificate without cuts after so much debate and research. It is also self-evident that the ban implies that books are all right, since they are read by the middle classes who can cope, but that movies are visited by riff-raff who might go straight to the nearest motorway and rape a Fiesta.

It reminds me of an occasion years ago when I was summoned as an "expert witness" to defend a porn film at the Old Bailey. "Mr Malcolm," said the learned judge, "with your expertise in this field, could you tell us what sort of people watch these films?" To my eternal shame, I bit back the comment that instantly sprang to mind, which was: "People like you, m'lud."

Despite my cowardice, we won the case — the method being to make the jury laugh enough to throw it out. Would that someone had a sense of humour about Crash — a serious, literate, well-made and daringly acted film which could benefit from a smidgen of irony or humour. Its problem is the earnestness with which it sets about its task of shocking us into an appreciation of the way the car, among other 20th century technological marvels, has influenced both our way of life and our psyches. This is the book of a moralist interpreted by a film-maker who agrees with him.

The earnestness is palpable as a bored producer of TV commercials, impishly called James G Ballard (James Spader), and his wife (Deborah Kara Unger) set about refreshing their sexual appetites at a re-creation of James Dean and Jayne Mansfield's fatal accidents. This has been organised by the mysterious autophiliac Vaughan. Meanwhile James has had an accident of his own involving Holly Hunter's sexy Dr Remington.

Cronenberg, eschewing the more open style with which he usually jolts us, calmly shows the obsessions developing and deepening as if his mind is enclosed in an ice-box.

The result, oddly enough, is stifling and largely lacking in emotion. Even the evil Vaughan is a one-dimensional character. We all know the correlation between sex and death as expressed in "le petit mort", the French definition of the orgasm. But the film is the opposite of orgasmic, however many times its characters come.

THAT CRASH is an intriguing film is beyond doubt — there is a glimmer of truth behind its pessimism. And the fact that it is cool rather than hot in one way provides further food for thought. But it makes for a dull film nothwithstanding its subject matter, and one that could easily be described as pornographic or obscene by those unable to divine its purposes, and who mistakenly regard it as an open celebration of sex and death.

The problem has always been that sincere films dealing with audacious subject matter are considered more dangerous than bad ones. Crash is palpably sincere and made by a reputable film-maker from the work of a distinguished writer. For some, that rules it completely out of court, not only for them but all of us. It's a pity, but rather more will be bored than excited or shocked. That is its failure.

Luc Besson's **The Fifth Element** is science fiction gone nuts, with 23rd century New York looking like the comic-book dreamscapes of Moebius and Jean-Claude Mezières and costumes by Jean Paul Gaultier that look as if they've been made for a particularly *outré* charity ball.

It has Bruce Willis as a flying cab-driver buzzing about in the air above the New York smog and finding himself in thrall to Milla Jovovich's waif. She, in turn, has something to do with finding the fifth element that will, together with the other four, save the world from Gary Oldman (the evil Zorg). Ian Holm also appears as Father Cornelius, a constipated prophet.

The rest of the plot is almost completely indecipherable, but contains set-pieces of such absurdity that the film may well become a cult. The makers hope it will do for science fiction what Blade Runner did years ago. But it doesn't live in the same universe as Ridley Scott's film, even if it occasionally manages to surprise a cynic such as myself.

The Finnish director Aki Kaurismaki, one of the great free spirits of the European cinema, has seldom had much luck in Britain. But perhaps his **Drifting Clouds** will put things right. This is a minimalist, melancholic and surprisingly funny comedy, pitched, according to Kaurismaki, somewhere between Capra's It's A Wonderful Life and De Sica's Bicycle Thieves.

As usual, Kaurismaki is having us on a bit, but in the process his downtrodden married couple (Kati Outinen and Kari Vaananen) — struggling to survive the economic depression that hit Finland like a treble vodka — triumph against the odds by opening a restaurant and attracting a set of customers as mournful as themselves.

Kaurismaki is worth seeing because nobody makes films like his. They inhabit a world that mirrors ours with a sometimes perfect simplicity.

Nancy Meckler's **Alive and Kicking** is written by Martin Sherman and sounds as if it is based on a play. It's not, but it has a good excuse for being theatrical in tone, since it tells the story of a dancer (Jason Flemyng) who, having lost a partner to Aids, has to come to terms with that tragedy and his own HIV-positive status.

Anyone who has worked in the theatre will recognise the characters on display, right down to Dorothy Tutin's highly eccentric founder. And the gay relationship between the young dancer and Antony Sher's shy clubber, which steadies him emotionally, is also handled with considerable tact and understanding.

Flemyng and Sher are the star turns in a movie that is both watchable and moving, even if it falls into the by now well-worn category of gay suffering.

Writing on thin ice

Christina Patterson

Skating To Antarctica
by Jenny Diski
Granta 250pp £14.99

THERE are not many novelists who would make a serious request to be writer in residence in Antarctica. But then there are not many novelists like Jenny Diski. If there was ever any doubt that Diski's masterful portrayal of isolation, depression and despair was rooted in personal experience, it is firmly dispelled by this, her first work of non-fiction. Readers of the London Review of Books, to which Diski is a regular contributor, will be aware of some of the horrific facts about her childhood. The fuller story, revealed in glimpses throughout this narrative, is even more grim. As a child, "Jennifer" would say "please" a hundred times before going to bed, in the hope of divine intervention in the fierce fights between her con-man father and dangerously neurotic mother. If she miscounted, it didn't work. It didn't work anyway. Eventually, "the money, the credit and my father all ran out for good and at the same time". Diski and her mother were left waiting for the bailiffs.

To relieve the monotony, her mother would throw hysterical screaming fits and tramp the streets with her daughter. She would also keep a knife in her handbag in the hope of bumping into her husband. He managed to escape a chance encounter at Tottenham Court Road Tube station, but years later concluded a lunch with his daughter by handing her a letter. "By the time you read this," his suicide note began, but by teatime he had changed his mind.

During her mother's frequent spells in the "loony bin", Diski sampled an array of domestic arrangements, from a bedsit with her father to foster families, progressive boarding schools and other creative solutions from the social services. It is perhaps not surprising that Diski should see her mother's disappearance, after her father's death and one final, histrionic scene in Camden library, as "the one truly generous act" of her life. Not surprising, either, that after such a childhood she should long for "a place of safety, a white oblivion".

The desire still fuels her fantasies: "I wanted white and ice as far as the eye could see, and I wanted it in the one place in the world that was uninhabited." Diski's request to the British Antarctic Survey for a residency is not granted. Instead, she sees an ad in the paper for "Antarctica — the cruise of a lifetime", and books herself a holiday.

Diski's joyful anticipation of her fantasy journey is interrupted by an announcement from her 18-year-old daughter, Chloe, who is determined to find out what happened to the grandmother she has never met.

The journey towards ice was always going to carry fairly weighty metaphorical significance, but this is reinforced at several levels. As a small child, Diski was taken regularly to the ice rink by her mother, who thought it would be glamorous to be the mother of an ice princess. "What she got," Diski observes, "was an ice maiden of another kind altogether." "Cold" and "chilling" are words often used about the narrative voice in her fiction; well-meaning friends remark on her coolness and even her doctor tells her: "You've never dealt with your deprivation and despair." Diski's response is: "I do, in my own way. I deal with it all the time and quite well."

IN FACT, Diski's arguments with conventional psychoanalytical thought, woven between accounts of the journey, memories of childhood and conversations with her daughter are the most fascinating elements of this book. Her musings about memory and the psyche are interspersed with acerbic observations of her fellow passengers, glimpses of penguins and elephant seals and retreats to the calm and whiteness of her cabin. On the brink of fulfilling her fantasy, she develops what she acknowledges might be a psychosomatic illness and wonders, coolly, if "I was going to prevent myself from landing on Antarctica". She concludes that it doesn't matter. "It's not the arriving but the not-arriving . . . it's not the seeing of the whales, but the possibility of choosing not to see them. . ."

Skating To Antarctica proves that "there are infinite ways of telling the truth, including fiction, and infinite ways of evading the truth, including non-fiction".

If you would like to order this book at a special price of £10.99 contact Books @ The Guardian Weekly



Rose Tremain . . . voracious curiosity about the world

PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID SILLITOE

Missing Valentina

Sylvia Brownrigg

The Way I Found Her
by Rose Tremain
Sinclair-Stevenson 362pp £15.99

ROSE TREMAIN has chosen a precocious 13-year-old — Lewis Little — as her narrator for this tale of summer love in Paris. It's a rather well-worn situation, perhaps, but in Tremain's hands it is worked up into something enchanting.

This is partly a consequence of how deep we get into Lewis's consciousness. In the past, Tremain has often shown an uncanny ability to bring children's complicated minds to life But chess-playing, French-speaking Lewis is something else. He finds everything is interesting: tales of the siege of Leningrad, the medieval notion of time, how roofs are built . . . In him, Tremain has found a character whose voracious curiosity about the world matches her own.

Lewis is spending the summer in Paris with his mother Alice, who is translating the latest medieval romance from bestselling author Valentina Gavrilovich. The English publishers are in such a hurry for it that Alice and Lewis are living in the author's luxurious flat so she can translate Valentina's work simultaneously. They have left father Hugh behind in Devon to fulfil his own secret summer ambition — building a hut in the garden for Alice, a loving project that Lewis knows, with the pity a child feels for a hapless parent, is doomed to failure.

Lewis himself is at an age where he's on the cusp of irrevocable change, and he suspects Paris will provide it. Early on he takes a walk with Alice in the Jardin des Plantes and foresees that "I've stepped so far out of my normal life, I may never get back to it". With deft comedy Tremain captures his adolescent preoccupations — masturbation; eating; age. Lewis is aware that at times, for instance in a summer hat his grandmother gave him, he looks a puny ten; while at another moment his reflection in a café window shows him a "cool sixteen". At moments of crisis, he still feels a nostalgic longing for the companionship of Elroy — his Action Man doll left behind in Devon.

In the book's first section, Lewis is mostly learning about the world. He learns "that women's lipsticks have names . . . that Russians eat real bread in churches . . , that Yves Montand used to be Valentina's favourite singer and that I had become her favourite lover in my mind". His most treasured knowledge comes from the vibrant and affectionate Valentina, who's 41, for whom he develops an eager passion during their evening sessions, when she helps him translate Alain-Fournier's Le Grand Meaulnes.

Lewis's other teachers include Didier, the existentialist roofer working on top of his attic room; Babba, Valentina's maid from Benin; Moinel, the tangerine-haired gay neighbour; and Valentina's Irish setter, Sergei, who is Lewis's glamorous escort around Parisian streets and parks. "If you're out with Sergei in a smart city, it's like you're Arthur Miller and Sergei's Marilyn Monroe," Lewis notes.

Then Valentina disappears. Initially the mystery of her whereabouts has a playful, literary quality: Lewis uses Le Grand Meaulnes and Crime And Punishment to give him clues about how to search for her. But he is the first to understand she's been kidnapped, and the combination of his love of solving problems and his love for Valentina herself means he will not stop his quest until he finds her.

One of Tremain's many artful touches is that none of the adults — least of all Alice, who's distracted by her own carryings-on with Didier — has any comprehension of the depth of Lewis's love and determination. For the reader, it is impossible to doubt them — and when Lewis discovers Valentina the reunion is very moving indeed.

Language that conquered the world

Robert McCrum

English as a Global Language
by David Crystal
Cambridge 150pp £12.95

IF, IN 1597, you had stopped someone in Cheapside, say, or Pudding Lane, and told him, or her, that 400 years hence the language of your conversation was going to become the most widely recognised on the planet, a global phenomenon of extraordinary international consequence, your interlocutor would very likely have said you were bonkers.

The rise of English is a remarkable and oft-told tale, and it is the virtue of this attractively short book that Professor Crystal should confine his narrative of the story's salient features to one succinct chapter. It is certainly quite a theme. When Julius Caesar landed in Britain more than 2,000 years ago, English did not exist. Five hundred years later, English, virtually incomprehensible to modern ears, was probably spoken by about as few people as currently speak Cherokee. About 1,000 years later, at the end of the 16th century, and after the Conquest, the Reformation and the arrival of commercial printing technology, English was the native speech of between 5 million and 7 million English persons. Even then, it was, in the words of a contemporary, "of small reatch, it stretcheth no further than this iland of ours, naie not there over all".

And yet now look at it. As the second millennium approaches, English is more widely scattered, more widely spoken and written than any other language has ever been. According to Crystal, whose efforts as a statistician almost rival his diligence as a linguist, about 2,090,000,000 people (well over a third of the world's population) are, as he puts it "routinely exposed to English".

So what happened? Someone once said that a language is a dialect with an army and a navy. In the simplest possible terms, one international empire (the British), based legally, commercially and educationally on the English language, was succeeded by another (the American), which shared virtually the same linguistic heritage.

Of course, it's not quite that simple, and, for lay readers, the most valuable part of Crystal's study is the section devoted to a speedy analysis of the cultural underpinning of this global reach, notably the influence of broadcasting, press, advertising, popular music and what he rather quaintly calls "motion pictures".

He is also up-to-date and informative in his identification of the (largely American) World Wide Web as a powerful reinforcer of American cultural and linguistic dominance. But when he comes to address the vital question: why is English a world language?, he does not do much better than to state, "It is a language which has repeatedly found itself in the right place at the right time", which is fine as far as it goes.

But what does the future hold? Will English, like Latin, fragment into mutually unintelligible languages in the way that's been predicted now for a century and more?

Having acknowledged the presence of the so-called New Englishes, his conclusion is not exactly ringing, but it is, in its own way, provocative. "It may be," Crystal writes, "that English, in some shape or form, will find itself in the service of the world community for ever." English as a Global Language is likewise tremendously serviceable. Its style is clear but not crystalline; it instructs but does not exactly sparkle. It should prove useful to teachers of English as a foreign language, and reassure those who are afraid that the language is going to the dogs.

Vietnam's victims of victory

John Pilger

Vietnam: Anatomy of a Peace
by Gabriel Kolko
Routledge 200pp £35hbk £10.99pbk

WHEN I returned to Vietnam two years ago, Hanoi presented a strange hybrid. The Odeon arcades, the avenues and villas and the replica of the Paris Opera, in which the French colons amused themselves with Berlioz and Bizet, were only slightly more decrepit. In the crowded Old Quarter little had changed: beneath the slate-grey skies diminutive houses huddled over open drains in crooked streets and the air was thick with the sweet-smelling smoke of wood-burning braziers.

I visited Mrs Thai Thi Tin, now in her eighties, a survivor of the B-52 bombers Nixon and Kissinger sent in 1972. Her life exemplified the epic suffering, sacrifice and courage of the Vietnamese. She lost five of her eight children. Her eldest, Lom, died at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, which was decisive in driving the French out of Indochina. Her next son, Khan, was killed shortly afterwards in the liberation of Hanoi. Her husband, a doctor in Ho Chi Minh's resistance, was killed evacuating the wounded. Her youngest, Luong, went missing in action in 1967 in the war against the US: one of 300,000 Vietnamese MIAs.

Rising above her tiny courtyard were new, threatening symbols in the form of some of the ugliest buildings on earth. In them reside the field commands of corporate Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, the United States and the City of London, and the World Bank and the IMF. As one American banker put it: "The circus is back in town."



Clutching to values in peril . . . a Buddhist monk in Vietnam

Marlboro and Dunhill are fighting over Hanoi. Meanwhile the dollar has taken over from the Vietnamese *dong*, giving the US Reserve Bank effective control of the flow of currency. Japan controls consumer lending, Singapore dominates property, Taiwan and Korea the "tax holiday" sweatshops.

It is as if, observes the historian Gabriel Kolko, the Vietnamese are finally being granted membership of the "international community" as long as they first create a society based on divisions of wealth and poverty, and exploited labour: a society in which achievements in health and education are no longer valued, the kind of foreign-imposed system they sacrificed so much to get rid of. The longest war this century, wrote Kolko in the postscript to his superb Anatomy Of A War, has finally ended in "the defeat of all who fought in it — and one of the great tragedies of modern history".

Few like Kolko have raised the alarm. In his new book, Vietnam: Anatomy Of A Peace, he reserves his anger for the Communist Party leadership who "forgot their own history" and embraced what they disingenuously call "market socialism". He charts the party's retreat, since 1986, before the forces of "globalisation"; the destruction of a relatively egalitarian society and the imposition of the Western system of economic class and of brutal divisions greater than Thatcherite Britain's; the demise of a proud health system that now ranks with Bangladesh; the privatising of an education system that produced a literacy rate of 90 per cent and now dances to World Bank/IMF demands for a "flexible" labour force.

Those wishing to follow the logical global path of the deity espoused by Gordon Brown's New Thatcherism should read this fine book by one of the wisest independent chroniclers of the century. At war for 30 years, isolated for 10, the heirs of Ho Chi Minh, desperate to break the American-led economic blockade, declared a policy of *doi moi*, meaning "renovation". With Reagan and Thatcher ascendant, their timing could not have been worse. Or perhaps, as Kolko suggests, they were nationalists first and never all that communist.

Certainly, they could never match the ideological zeal of the Americans, then and now. Or perhaps, says Kolko, "the dilemma facing all revolutionaries is that their talent to seize power is quite unrelated to the skills essential for administering and holding it". Or perhaps they were simply given no choice by the enduring masters of the world.

Whatever the reason for their folly and then betrayal of a peasantry who supported them in an epic resistance to imperialism, history does not end with the Marlboro Man, Kentucky Fried and mobile phones. Vietnam is not China; obedience requires consensus in such a remarkably close-knit society, and the new exploitation has powerful enemies, in the army and among the people. Kolko describes a growing, open revolt, which the leadership admits is "becoming more and more complex and serious", with "strikes, demonstrations, road blockages" and "hot spots" all over the countryside. Nothing like it, he writes, has happened previously, meaning that the most difficult battle of all may have begun: and this being Vietnam, it is far from lost.

Rosaries and manacles

Elizabeth Young

Impossible Saints
by Michèle Roberts
Little, Brown 308pp £14.99

HIGHLY ambitious, Impossible Saints is the novel towards which all Michèle Roberts's previous work has tended. It involves a remarkable, complex interweaving of all her major themes — language and creativity, feminism, Catholicism and a luxuriantly sensual response to the natural world.

We follow the story of Josephine, who is ironically decreed a saint for all the wrong reasons at around the time of the Inquisition. A saint she may have been, but not a Catholic one. Her status in the Church is achieved by her adept duplicity in the face of threatened torture as a heretic. Josephine spends 20 years as a nun, loses her faith and samples the joys of carnality. She envisages a community which will secretly cater for the contradictory, forbidden needs of real women but dies before attempting this impossible dream.

A visionary and a writer, she was seduced by books in childhood. She leaves behind a true account of her life, scratched on papier-mâché and strung into a rosary. This heretical work is lost, just as the world has lost the true thoughts and feelings of countless women of the past.

Interspersed with Josephine's story are little allegories of fictional female saints, a parodic version of a "Lives of the Saints" that traces the roots of many continuing female torments back to their origins. These "saints" suffer creative repression, body hatred, addiction to perfection; they represent women as sexually rapacious, whorish, hysterical, insane, incestuous. Guilty, guilty — but Roberts's subtle creativity inverts and rights their status, just as it does with Josephine.

All these telling little tales are set in that high-class version of sword-and-sorcery fairyland so irresistible to literary women — where mini-skirts and make-up co-exist with bazaars and opium pipes. The intent is timeless universality, but the effect can be inadvertently comic.

This caveat cannot detract from the resourceful intelligence of a dazzling book whose formidable themes have been forged into links as strong and intricate as a silver chain — one which is, simultaneously, lucent jewellery, heretical rosary and heavy manacles.

Calamity Coyne

D J Taylor

Headbanger
by Hugo Hamilton
Secker & Warburg 230pp £9.99

THE HARD-BOILED Dublin thriller, in which heroin dealers are run to earth in Irishtown and the inevitable corpse gets dredged up from the Liffey, is an increasingly fashionable item. Screen-sanctioned, too, with the result that many a scene in Headbanger, from the torched cars to the eerie dockside climax, has an oddly filmic quality. Even the elemental impulses driving its policeman hero, Coyne ("He was going to sort out some of these bastards. Blow them away. The Dublin Dirty Harry"), can be traced back to cinema.

Hugo Hamilton's ability to defy some of these conventions — to produce what is in the last resort a psychological study masquerading as a thriller, rather than the other way around — is one of the many attractions of this book. Coyne, in particular ("the most complicated man in Ireland"), a whimsical, well-meaning Garda prone to lecture his wife on the evils of pollution and regale his colleagues with obscurities ransacked from the National Geographic, is a terrific creation — intense, anxious, convinced, amid the rubbish of a decaying city, that "You could try and change the environment and the circumstances around you, or you could try and change yourself," and that only the first option will do.

Needless to say, the professional and domestic imperatives involved in following these instructions are endlessly complicated by Coyne's calamitous temperament. On the one hand his vendetta against a particularly ghoulish drugs baron named Drummer Cunningham has reached such a pitch of animosity that even his colleagues are trying to warn him off. On the other his wife Carmel has discovered art and the ministrations of a smooth-talking English instructor.

The action speeds up a gear when Coyne, paying a *sub rosa* call on Mr Big's tacky nightclub with the aim of coaxing confidences out of a drug-stuffed hostess named Naomi, responds to summary eviction by setting fire to the proprietor's Range Rover. Subsequently, everything spins out of control. With the villains on his tail, and suspended from the force for pushing the art master over a hedge, Coyne decides to take the law into his own hands.

Sharply written, and consistently funny in its incidental effects, Headbanger is nicely open-ended, the formal rebuke of evil balanced by the thought of unresolved emotional lives snaking on into the future Some of the best moments take place outside the squad car: Coyne making up stories for his children or stopping to rescue a hedgehog from the road (with predictably disastrous results), delightful bits of uxoriousness. Hamilton's descriptions of average married life alone are enough to separate him from many a more spangled contemporary.

Paperbacks

Nicholas Lezard

How to Tell When You're Tired: A Brief Examination of Work, by Reg Theriault (Norton, £9.95)

A BRIEF treatise on Adam's curse by a worker. A real worker, that is, who worked as a fruit picker, a longshoreman, a trucker, a packer — you know, work, the real blue-collar stuff — and not some weedy grad with hairless ankles and a thesis to write. I haven't read anything else that has such a reliable ring of authority, and when he launches into anecdotes about, say, horrible work accidents ("he just stood there holding his hand up, saying, 'I'll be goddamned'"), he has a straightforward but eloquent point to make about labour practice. Bosses should be made to read this book.

A Separate Creation: How Biology Makes Us Gay, by Chandler Burr (Bantam, £7.99)

IF THIS book is anything to go by, it looks like the nature/nurture debate regarding homosexuality (and not just homosexuality) is over. Well, not really. If one of a pair of identical twins is gay, then there is a 50 per cent chance that the other one will be, too. Ten times the normal going rate for its incidence — but if homosexuality were truly genetic, then you'd expect a 100 per cent correlation. I think I've got that right. Anyway, here is chapter and verse on the subject, very entertainingly written.

The Illustrated History of the Countryside, by Oliver Rackham (Phoenix, £12.99)

LOOKS like a coffee-table book but it is to the British countryside what David Thomson's Biographical Dictionary Of Film is to cinema: that is, fascinating, opinionated, revelatory and essential. From Rackham's introduction: "In my South Norfolk childhood I wondered why roads had bends, why lanes were sunk into the ground, what dogwood and spindle were doing in hedges, why fields were of odd shapes, and why elms stopped abruptly north of Bungay. These are difficult questions, and their roots go deep into the past. The object of this book is to discover some of the meanings of landscape."

He is forthright, and upsets casual sentimental notions of what the countryside is all about. "A sad little mark of the 1980s was the 'area set aside as a haven for wildlife' attached to any large development — as though there was something called wildlife which would come when summoned, and would do what its masters told it."

If you would like to order this book at the special price of £9.99 contact Books @ The Guardian Weekly

Andalusian cornucopia

Mark Cocker

THE Spanish nature reserve known as the Coto Doñana is often described as the most important wetland in western Europe. Comprising more than 70,000 hectares of marsh, pinewood and sand dune at the mouth of the River Guadalquivir in Andalusia, it is also one of the largest and has achieved the status of both a Biosphere Reserve and Ramsar site, two of the most important designations in international conservation.

The population figures for some of its wildlife are equally impressive and sometimes read more like totals for a whole country than just a single park. During the winter, for instance, there can be more than a quarter of a million duck, 70,000 geese and 10,000 flamingos feeding within its boundaries. In spring and summer thousands of herons and shore birds flock to the lagoons to breed. Nor does Doñana lack attention-grabbing rarities. It is the world stronghold for the Spanish race of lynx, the Pardel, while 10 per cent of one of the planet's rarest birds, the Spanish Imperial Eagle, nest in its pine woods.



ILLUSTRATION: ANN HOBDAY

Having described the reserve's manifold importance, I should also register the one overshadowing irony which trails most visitors to the area. The wildlife riches of the Coto Doñana are often more easily appreciated on paper than they can be experienced in person. For one thing, much of it is inaccessible. In fact the 40km of beach within the park must be the most undisturbed stretch of coastline in all Spain. The reserve's interior marshes are also off-limits, to protect the rare birds and mammals from disturbance.

Although there are points of access where one can obtain panoramic views over the wetlands, by mid-morning they often liquefy in the [illegible] such conditions, distant flamingos and herons rise eerily insubstantial from the silver plates of water. Sometimes their stick legs are so invisible in the heat-haze they appear to float wraith-like across the surface.

One of the only ways to obtain a more intimate experience of the park is to drive for several hours along the rutted tracks around Doñana's perimeter, which finally lead to a place known as Cerrado Gerrido. The one benefit of this bumpy odyssey is that you pass the expanses of cropland which now also encircle the reserve. For the rich alluvial plains and abundance of water that have made Doñana so important for conservationists have been as highly prized by farmers. Now their irrigation schemes, coupled with pressures exerted by a neighbouring tourist development at Matalascañas have made Doñana's future a little insecure.

Fortunately, at Cerrado Gerrido the concerns we might have felt for Doñana's future were quickly forgotten. From this spot the marshes seemed to go on forever until vanishing on a distant horizon, while in the foreground unfolded a wetland tableau of extraordinary richness. Purple and squacco herons, their lacy breeding plumes riffling in the breeze, stood proud of the vegetation on newly built platforms. Occasionally a heron would struggle flapping and ungainly towards its nest carrying a stick the length of its own body. Glossy ibis, the colour of exotic plums, swirled up from an unseen colony within the reedbeds, then fell away again to feed. Momentarily a little bittern hunched on the top of a single stem like a massive warbler, before scrambling back down into its mysterious world of reed and water.

The brilliant Andalusian sunshine chiselled out of all those random and fragmentary scenes with an emboldened clarity, and for that hour, at least, we understood in full Doñana's exceptional reputation.

Chess Leonard Barden

GOLD at the European championship in Pula was a fine result, but I disagree with columnists who described it as England's best ever. After taking a two-point lead, England faltered in the final round and were placed ahead only on a tie-break of what was virtually Russia's second team, playing without Kasparov, Karpov or Kramnik.

Matthew Sadler made the best score, as he did in the Olympiad, and without him England's performance would have been ordinary. The world championships in Lucerne later this year will have a stronger Russia, the Olympiad medal teams Ukraine and the US, plus the improving Chinese. It's a boost to finish ahead of the Russians, but Pula doesn't compare with England's gold at the 1978 world under-26 championship, or with the silvers at the 1984 and 1986 Olympiads, when England nearly won gold against a Soviet Union team with Kasparov and Karpov at their peak.

The really impressive England performance was from the women, who won "only" a bronze, yet were the near-equals of the world-class Georgia and Romania. All three players — the experienced Sue Lalic and the teenagers Harriet Hunt and Ruth Sheldon — scored well in an event that represents all the top countries bar China.

Short v Chernin

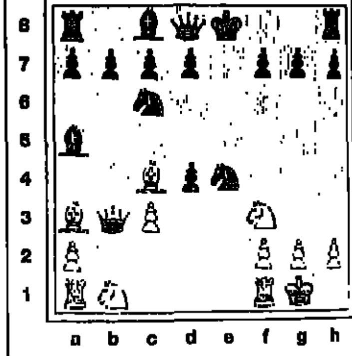
1 e4 d6 2 Nc3 g6 3 Bc4 Bg7 4 f4! Shrewd move order deception. White's formation encouraged Black to recall the Grand Prix Attack, an English speciality against the Sicilian Defence, where if Black develops his knight at f6, then White later rolls up the K-side by Qe1-h4, f5, and Bh6.

e6 5 Nf3 Ne7 . . . so Black prepares to counter the f4-f5 advance [illegible] White to switch back into a main line Sicilian where the e7 knight is misplaced. **cxd4 8 Nxd4 0-0 9 0-0 a6 10 Kh1 Nbc6 11 Be3 Na5 12 a4 Qc7 13 Qd3 Nec6?!** Events prove that Black's attack on b2 is just a minor irritant to Short's advance on the other flank. Nxb3 and b6 looks better, hoping to utilise the bishop pair.

14 Rad1 Rd8 15 f5 Ne5 16 Qe2 Nac4 17 Bc1 Bd7 18 Qe1 Mating threats loom to g7 or h7. **Rdc8 19 Qh4 Qd8 20 Bg5 Qe8** If f6 21 fxg6 Nxg6 22 Bxf6 Nxh4 23 Bxd8 Rxd8 24 Bxc4 wins. **21 f6 Bh8 22 Nf3! Nxb2 23 Rxd6 Nbc4 24 Rd4 Nxf3 25 Rxf3 Ne5 26 Rh3 h5 27 Ne2** Preparing the final attack. A sacrifice at h5 will fatally expose the BK.

Rc5 28 Nf4 Ng4 29 Nxh5 Rxg5 30 Qxg5 Nf2+ 31 Kg1 Nxh3+ 32 gxh3 Bc6 33 Nf4 Kh7 34 e5 And now White threatens 35 Nxg6 fxg6 36 Rh4+ Kg8 37 Rxh8+ Kxh8 38 Qh6+ and 39 Qg7 mate. **Bf3 35 Kf2 Qc6 36 Rc4 Resigns.**

No 2476



A century ago, this week's puzzle embarrassed world champion Wilhelm Steinitz. Black (to move) looks lost, but Steinitz discovered 1 . . . Ng5 2 Re1+ Ne6 or 2 Nxg5 Qxg5 3 Bxf7+ (or 3 Re1+) Kd8 with black counterplay. Why then, days later, did he admit he had blundered?

No 2475: The game went 1 . . . [illegible] Kg6+ 3 fxg6 Rxc8 4 g7+ Kg8 stalemate. Instead, 1 . . . Rf8! 2 Rc8 (2 Rg1 Rg5) Kg8! 3 Ra8 Rg5 4 Rc8 Rxh5+ wins, or 2 Rc7 Rg5 3 Rd7 Kg8 4 Rc7 Re8 5 Rd7 Kf8 when 6 Rxf7+ no longer stalemates.

Quick crossword no. 370

Across

1 Keep making new plans (4,3,6)
8 Jumping insect (4)
9,10 "If you can't stand the heat, ——" (3,3,2,3,7)
12 Day nursery (6)
14 Residence for students etc (6)
15 (Moral) weight (10)
19 Conduct (business) (8)
20 Lazy (4)
21 Keep going to the end (4,3,6)

Down

2 Wait — grip firmly! (4,4)
3 Practical joke (5)
5 Get hold of or draw level with (5)
4 Bed wear (7)
6 Thomas, medieval philosopher (7)
7 Develop (4)
11 Classical "labourer"! (8)
13 It has a pot and a breast (7)
14 Opponent of authorised teaching (7)
16 Fruit (5)
17 Farewell (5)
18 Dirt or courage (4)

Last week's solution

Bridge Zia Mahmood

DO YOU ever have nightmares? When we were children, bad dreams involved dark places mysteriously entered and terrifyingly inescapable. As we grew older and found the irresistible addiction of bridge, our tired minds discovered new ways to dream, as mischievous playing cards danced in our subconscious. Our nightmares adapted also, and although we learn to live with them, the terror never entirely disappears.

For some of us, there is a particular card that is at the centre of our worst nocturnal experiences. Look at this deal, and you will realise which card gives Peter Weichsel nightmares.

Peter, as intense and meticulous a player as ever lived, is miserly in his defence and declarer play — he suffers a thousand deaths each time the opponents steal from him a trick that is his by right. Playing in Canberra in the Australian Championships, he picked up these cards as West at love all:

♠K5 ♥AKJ62 ♦6 ♣AJ432

In the worst nightmares, your situation appears normal enough — even favourable — before at the last moment you are plunged into the abyss of horror. That was exactly what happened to Peter as the bidding proceeded like this:

South	West Peter	North	East
1♦	1♥	Dble(1)	3♥(2)
4♥(3)	Dble	Pass	Pass
4♠	5♣	6♠	7♣
7♠	Dble	Pass	Pass
Pass			

(1) A negative double, showing scattered high cards and four spades. (2) A pre-emptive raise, showing four hearts without much in the way of high-card strength. (3) A cue bid, showing a void or singleton in hearts with good support for North's spades.

Peter was a little concerned when his partner sacrificed in seven clubs over the enemy's six spades, but when South went on to seven spades, the sun shone brightly once more. Peter doubled confidently, and with equal confidence led the ace of hearts . . .

North
♠AQ32
♥9873
♦Q7
♣K97

West
♠K5
♥AKJ62
♦6
♣AJ432

East
♠109
♥Q1054
♦1082
♣Q865

South
♠J8764
♥None
♦AKJ9543
♣10

South ruffed the opening lead, led a trump to dummy's queen, cashed the ace of trumps and ran his diamond suit. All the clubs disappeared from dummy, and a few moments later the players were entering the unusual score of 1,770 in the North-South column.

Pity poor Peter. Most nights he sleeps soundly, but every so often he will wake up in a cold sweat, clutching wildly at the bedclothes and gasping for air. He isn't dreaming about bogymen or dark and lonely caverns. He's dreaming about the ace of clubs — the trick that got away. ©

Football Tournoi de France: France 0 England 1



Wave of confidence: Lee, left, and Shearer celebrate the striker's late winner PHOTOGRAPH: MATTHEW ASHTON

Shearer polishes off French

David Lacey in Montpellier

IF THIS is a false English dawn, then clearly somebody is a dab hand at forging Constable landscapes. Glenn Hoddle's team continue to rewrite history. England are no longer about Euro 96 and all that.

Only nine days ago no England side had won in Poland for 31 years, Italy had not been beaten for 20 and France had not lost to an English side on French soil since 1949. Records may be there to be broken but Hoddle's players have just wrecked an entire HMV store.

On Wednesday last week in Nantes, Cesare Maldini was left with plenty to think about ahead of the World Cup qualifier in Rome on October 11 after goals from Ian Wright and Paul Scholes saw off his Italian side. The latest success in the Tournoi de France was achieved in the Stade de la Mosson in Montpellier last Saturday. Alan Shearer punished a fumble by Fabien Barthez four minutes from time to give England victory.

The importance of this victory became clear 24 hours later when Brazil's 3-3 draw with Italy meant England were winners of the four-team tournament, with an unassailable six points. Their final game is against Brazil at the Parc des Princes. England have beaten Brazil only three times in 18 meetings going back to 1956. Their last win was at Wembley in 1990. Such is the mood of optimism among Hoddle's players that anything is possible now.

Hoddle calls Shearer his "cutting edge". If England do return to France for the World Cup next summer and Shearer is still in this sort of form, all things will be possible. "Alan has got everything," Hoddle said. "He's got the right temperament. With him, for all the praise he receives, it's just a matter of going on to the next game."

The victory, though less spectacular than the one over Italy, was nearly as satisfying in a different way. Sol Campbell looks a better international defender with every game and Hoddle was pleased with the defensive discipline shown by David Beckham and Paul Gascoigne in protecting the back three.

Gascoigne and Beckham found the quality of pass or cross to expose the defence, although it was a centre from Graeme le Saux that found Shearer rising at the far post 10 minutes before half-time for a header which drew an excellent save from Barthez.

Six minutes later, after Beckham's through ball had sent Shearer clear, the England captain's cross left Ian Wright with just Barthez to beat but his shot hit the goalkeeper's body and ricocheted over. Just past the hour, after Beckham's searching centre, Barthez dropped smartly on another header from Shearer, and by then Christophe Dugarry had twice gone close enough to suggest France could win the game.

Yet the French attack lacked an ability to pick a pocket or two, and this was what decided last Saturday's outcome. Shearer accepted a pass from Gascoigne and immediately found Teddy Sheringham, who had just come on for Wright, in space on the right.

As Sheringham drove the ball across low, it took a deflection off Bixente Lizarazu, one of the French substitutes, which possibly confused Barthez. The keeper allowed it to slip through his grasp, and that left Shearer to grab the unexpected. He doesn't miss gifts like that.

Tennis French Open

Kuerten dances to his first title glory

Stephen Bierley in Paris

"NOW IS the most difficult moment," said Gustavo Kuerten as he grasped the microphone to make his champion's acceptance speech at Roland Garros last Sunday. In truth it was not.

The 20-year-old Brazilian managed everything during the two weeks of the French Open with remarkable *savoir-faire* for one so inexperienced in the ways of the Grand Slam world — and with such brio.

This was an astonishing victory. Before reaching Paris, Kuerten, a string-bean of a player, had never won a senior ATP tournament anywhere. But Spain's Sergi Bruguera, the French champion in 1993 and 1994, had quietly told Spanish journalists after the semi-finals that he believed he would be extremely hard pushed to defeat this dynamic and delightful young man.

He was right. Kuerten rushed in on Bruguera like the sea. The Spaniard tried desperately to build defensive ditches but the blue-and-yellow tide swept over his best efforts and he went under 6-3, 6-4, 6-2 in less than two hours.

This time last year, Kuerten, as a qualifier, lost in straight sets to South Africa's Wayne Ferreira. He went one round better in Australia last January but nobody expected this to happen. But then it has been a remarkable French championship, with upsets, upheavals and surprises around virtually every corner.

"It will be extremely interesting to watch Gustavo's progress from now on," said Bjorn Borg, who won this title five times and was there to present the trophy, along with Guillermo Vilas, a former champion himself.

There is no question that Kuerten deserved to win, for he beat two other French champions, Yevgeny Kafelnikov and Thomas Muster, in earlier rounds of this topsy-turvy tournament. His delight was huge, he and his family performing a samba afterwards outside the court in true Rio style.

In the women's singles final, the surprise was provided by Iva Majoli. The 19-year-old Croat recorded a 6-4, 6-2 victory over Martina Hingis of Switzerland. Majoli played wonderfully well, though there was no doubt that the 16-year-old Swiss No 1's lack of preparation finally caught up with her. By the second set she looked visibly drained.

Hingis was injured in a riding accident in April. It led to surgery on her left knee and she arrived in Paris without a competitive match since she won at Hilton Head, South Carolina, on April 6. It was her first defeat in 41 matches.

Sports Diary Shiv Sharma

Sheringham seeks greener pastures

ENGLAND striker Teddy Sheringham has lodged a formal transfer request with his club Tottenham Hotspur, citing unfulfilled personal ambition as his main motive.

Although several Premiership managers are interested in the 31-year-old footballer, Kenny Dalglish would dearly love to have him at Newcastle United to pair him with Alan Shearer, to recreate at club level the partnership that has proved so potent on the international stage. The multi-million-pound swap deal is likely to involve Les Ferdinand.

At Arsenal, manager Arsen Wenger further strengthened the Gallic influence by buying two players from his former club Monaco for a combined fee in the region of $8 million. The two footballers, both 26, are Emmanuel Petit, a utility player capped 15 times, and the central defender Gilles Grimandi. They will bring the number of French players at Highbury to five with Patrick Vieira, Remi Garde and Nicolas Anelka already on the club's books.

On the debit side, the Scottish international Scott Booth left Aberdeen on a free transfer to join the newly-crowned European champions Borussia Dortmund. He accepted a three-year deal in Germany and joins fellow-Scot Paul Lambert, who starred in Dortmund's recent victory over Juventus.

SCOTLAND went four points clear at the top of their group after a 1-0 victory over Belarus in the World Cup qualifying match in Minsk. Gary McAllister scored the winner from the penalty spot early in the second half — the captain's first international goal since Euro 92. It urged the Belarussians forward, and only some remarkable defending prevented an equaliser.

RUUD GULLIT, manager of Chelsea, received South Africa's highest decoration for foreigners from President Nelson Mandela. He was presented with the Order of Good Hope at half-time in the friendly between South Africa and Holland in Johannesburg. Ten years ago, Gullit dedicated his European Footballer of the Year award to the then imprisoned Mandela.

BENNY THE DIP held off a late charge by Silver Patriarch to win Britain's first £1 million ($1.6m) Epsom Derby in a tension-packed photo finish. Willie Ryan, its jockey, was six lengths clear at the 2 furlong pole when Silver Patriarch, ridden by Pat Eddery, moved into top gear. It almost caught up with the leader, but Benny The Dip held on by a short head. The odds-on favourite Entrepreneur was never in the reckoning, coming home fourth, while Romanov took third place.

COLIN MONTGOMERIE won golf's Compaq European Grand Prix at Slaley Hall, Northumberland. A record-equalling final round of 65 gave the Scot a commanding five-stroke win over Retief Goosen of South Africa, with Lee Westwood in third place.

Britain's Laura Davies meanwhile maintained her record of winning a European tour event at least once each year since 1985 by taking the Danish Open title at Vejle. On her first European tour appearance this season she shot a closing round of 69 for a nine-under-par aggregate of 207 to finish three strokes clear of Sweden's Maria Hjorth.

COUNTY cricketers in England have formed their own marketing company in an attempt to generate the high-profile and commercial earning power enjoyed by many football players. David Graveney, England's chairman of selectors and general secretary of the Professional Cricketers' Association, is one of the four directors of the company. The firm, PCA Management Ltd, has already launched a number of money-raising initiatives

BERNIE ECCLESTONE, who controls international television revenues for Formula One racing, has reportedly almost doubled his pay to $87 million a year, making himself the world's top salaried executive. He gave himself the pre-retirement rise in the last financial year, before a planned flotation of his private company, Formula One Promotions and Administration, on the stock market, according to a report. The flotation is expected to go ahead next month, valuing the company at around $3.2 billion.



Ecclestone: $87 million salary

THE former Warwickshire all-rounder Paul Smith has been banned by the English Cricket Board disciplinary committee from the professional game until April 1999 after he admitted in a newspaper that he regularly took drugs during his 15-year career at Edgbaston. The 33-year-old can continue to player in the Warwickshire League for Berkswell.

AUSTRALIA'S world motorcycling champion Michael Doohan, riding a Honda, charged to his fifth victory out of six races this season when he won the 500cc French Grand Prix at Le Castellet last Sunday.